Here's Something About GENERAL SEMANTICS

A Primer for Making Sense of Your World

Steve Stockdale

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A Primer for Making Sense of Your World

by
STEVE STOCKDALE

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For those who never knew,
knew of, or even imagined me,
whom I would never know without time-binding,
to whom I am indebted beyond the verbal level.

Alfred Korzybski

J. Samuel Bois
O.R. Bontrager
Francis P. Chisholm
S.I. Hayakawa
Wendell Johnson
M. Kendig
Irving J. Lee
Mary Morain
Elwood Murray
Harry L. Weinberg
and all *the others*

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Here's Something About GENERAL SEMANTICS

A Primer for Making Sense of Your World

Those are the doubting reactions of impetuous youth. Today, you learn something. Tomorrow you think you can already be letter perfect in technique. But the 'system' is not a hand me down suit that you can put on and walk off in, or a cookbook where all you need to do is find the page and there is your recipe. No, it is a whole way of life, you have to grow up in it, educate yourself in it for years. You cannot cram it into yourselves, you can assimilate it, take it into your blood and flesh, until it becomes second nature, becomes so organic as part of your being that you are transformed by it for all time. It is a system that must be studied in parts and then merged into a whole so that it can be understood in all its fundamentals. When you can spread it all out before you like a fan you will have attained a true grasp of it. You cannot hope to do this all at once.

Constantine Stanislavski

I must stress that I give no panaceas, but experience shows that when the methods of general semantics are applied, the results are usually beneficial, whether in law, medicine, business, etc., education on all levels, or personal inter-relationships, be they in family, national, or international fields. If they are not applied, but merely talked about, no results can be expected.

Alfred Korzybski

PREFACE: Something About This Book

This book has been thirty years in the making. In November 1979, while taking a graduate course in linguistics, I wrote a book report on S.I. Hayakawa's *Language in Thought in Action*. I was particularly impressed with his contention that:

> ... widespread intraspecific co-operation [co-operation within the human species] through the use of language is the fundamental mechanism of human survival, and that, when the use of language results, as it so often does, in the creation or aggravation of disagreements and conflicts, there is something wrong with the speaker, the listener, or both. (1)

I concluded my report with my contention:

> The greatest result from reading this book is that my awareness of the purposes, uses, and limitations of language has been considerably broadened. ... Just in preparing this short paper, I have realized how difficult it is to write about words. But I feel that this study is important. As our lives become more and more complicated due to rapidly changing technology, the decay of longstanding institutions, and increasing individual freedoms, our willingness and ability to cooperate must also increase. An understanding of language, as outlined by Mr. Hayakawa, is essential for continued cooperation. (2)

Little did I know then that this little book report (for which I received an A — "*Your paper is well written, the contents well described and the ideas therein fully explained. Your paper shows intuitive thought and expresses that process clearly.*") was, in a sense, introducing me to the rest of my life. [The paper appears in this book under **SUPPLEMENTARIES**.]

In 1986, I found a worn copy of the book (published in 1949 under this title, revised after its first publication in 1941 as *Language in Action*) in a used book store. I bought it and, inspired for the second time by Hayakawa's lucid prose, began making extensive notes, even taking the book with me on a business trip to Rome, Italy. When questioned by my travel colleague, I resolutely, if naively, answered, "I'm going to re-write this book and bring it up to date."

Seven years later, after a chance conversation with a friend in a bar, I learned there was more to this "general semantics stuff" than just Hayakawa's book. Alfred Korzybski, Irving J. Lee, Wendell Johnson, J.S. Bois, Charlotte and Allen Read, M. Kendig, and dozens of others became familiar names that would lead and accompany me on my educational journey. That journey eventually developed into a vocation, which transformed into a profession, which has now become something akin to a quest.

What, one might ask, *is so quest-worthy about this general semantics stuff?*

One answer — my answer — may best be summarized by briefly recounting my own understanding, growth, and evolution over the past thirty years regarding GS.

As evidenced by my report on Hayakawa's book, my initial interest in the subject focused exclusively on language. I was especially intrigued by what I understood to be the mechanics of manipulative language practiced by advertisers, public relations types, and propagandists that resulted in perpetuating stereotypes, biases, snap judgments, and uncritical lemming-like thinking.

I learned more about GS from writers and educators other than Hayakawa just as I was coming out of an especially trying personal period. From 1991-1993, I talked regularly with a therapist to help me deal with the emotional effects of a divorce, loss of self esteem and identity, job dissatisfaction, and a general sense of disaffection with my life.

As that period came to end with 1993, I knew I felt better.

Why?

I considered what actually transpired during those dozens of therapy visits that eventually resulted in positive changes ... I talked; the therapist listened; she asked questions; I answered; I talked some more; she listened; she commented; I thought; I reflected some more; I talked. And somehow, at the end of the three years, I felt better because I thought and felt differently about things. I had a different attitude about myself and my life.

But why?

I paid for the therapy sessions in dollars, but the real 'currency' that was exchanged during those therapeutic conversations was *words*. Through the talking and listening and thinking of thousands of words, my behaviors and attitudes changed. It was pretty obvious to me, after having by then read a half-dozen GS books, that the benefits of general semantics were not limited to just *language* but also extended to *behaviors*. And I couldn't help but add up all the checks I had written to the therapist and wonder ... *What if I had known about GS earlier and been able to practice and apply these principles then? How much time, money, and wasted disaffection might I have saved or avoided?*

So as the new millennium began, I was aware of these two different but complementary benefits to general semantics:

1) *Linguistic*, related to verbal awareness and conscientious language habits, summarized, perhaps, as "how I talk to and understand others;" and

2) *Behavioral*, related to what could be considered psychological or relevant to behavioral science, summarized, perhaps, as "how I talk to and understand myself."

In the past few years, I've come to appreciate a broader, even more generalized consequence of general semantics. Beyond the linguistic or psychological impacts, I've determined that, for me, another "most significant" consequence of this discipline can be articulated as:

3) How it affects one's highly individual and unique *point of view, world view,* or *general orientation*; in other words, how one actually perceives and experiences what one encounters during the course of one's life.

This third consequence has come into sharper focus for me as I've read more about neuroscience and learned more about what leading neuroscientists have learned about the human brain and how it functions. I've found this brain and neuroscience stuff particularly interesting because, having read Korzybski, I've found the latest literature quite ... *familiar*.

I say *familiar* because, by my reading and understanding, the current scientists have, through their research using the latest and greatest technologies and methods, validated Korzybski's fundamental core premises. Rather than "updating Korzybski," as some (including, sadly, myself in 1986) have offered as a seemingly-appropriate admonition, it now seems to me that the neuroscience of the 21st century has just now begun to catch up with Korzybski's general semantics of 1933.

Consider the following statements pertaining to a fundamental premise of Korzybski's general semantics (in my words):

What we perceive as 'the world' *is not* 'the world out there'; what we perceive is merely an abstraction of 'the world out there,' mediated through each individual's nervous system.

In *Science and Sanity* (1933), Korzybski observed:

> Let us recall, in this connection, the familiar example of a rotary fan, which is made up of separate radial blades, but which, when rotating with a certain velocity, gives the impression of a *solid disk*. In this case the 'disk' is not 'reality,' but a nervous [system] integration, or abstraction from the rotating blades ...
>
> The 'disk' represents a *joint phenomenon* of the rotating blades and of the abstracting power of our nervous system, which registers only the gross macroscopic aspects and slow velocities, but not the finer activities on subtler levels. (3)

Seventy-two years later (2005), neurobiologist Christof Koch, professor of biology and engineering at the California Institute of Technology, validated Korzybski's assertion that our individual nervous systems (brains) create our perceptions of what exists 'out there':

> Conscious perception is, in a sense, a con job of the brain. It suggests there's a stable world out there and there's a very simple relationship between what's out there in the world and what's inside our head but in fact it's a very complicated relationship. It's actively constructed by our brain. We're now beginning to understand that what I see in my head is actually constructed by my head, by my neurons ... So clearly this naive, realistic view that there's a world, there's my head and this simple mapping, it can't be true. (4)

Jeff Hawkins, founder of Palm Computing and the Redwood Center for Theoretical Neuroscience, stated:

> Your cortex doesn't really know or sense the world directly. The only thing the cortex knows is the pattern streaming in on the input axons. Your perceived view of the world is created from these patterns, including your sense of self. (5)

> Your perception of the world is really a fabrication of your model of the world. You don't really see light or sound. You perceive it because your model says this is how the world is, and those patterns invoke the model. It's hard to believe, but it really is true. (6)

V.S. Ramachandran, MD, Director of the Center for Brain and Cognition and Professor with the Psychology Department and Neurosciences Program at the University of California, San Diego, and Adjunct Professor of Biology at the Salk Institute, noted:

> Our brains are essentially modelmaking machines. We need to construct useful, virtual reality simulations of the world that we can act on. (7)

And Francis Crick, Nobel Laureate and co-discover of DNA with James Watson, wrote:

1. You are easily deceived by your visual system.
2. The visual information provided by our eyes can be ambiguous.
3. Seeing is a constructive process. (8)

... seeing is a constructive process, meaning that the brain does not passively record the incoming visual information. It actively seeks to interpret it. (9)

What you see is not what is really there; it is what your brain believes is there. In many cases this will indeed correspond well with characteristics of the visual world before you, but in some cases your "beliefs" may turn out to be wrong. Seeing is an active, constructive process. Your brain makes the best interpretation it can according to its previous experiences and the limited and ambiguous information provided by your eyes. (10)

This differentiation between what exists/happens in the external 'out there' world (what we've unfortunately and mistakenly labeled *objective*), compared to our internal 'in here' experiences of what exists/happens (what we've labeled *subjective*) represents a critical distinction with significant logical consequences. Indeed, this marks the first level (or order) in what Korzybski termed the physio-neurological process of *abstracting*.

Simplified, *abstracting* refers to the ongoing human process:

What Happens
≠ What I Sense
≠ How I Respond
≠ "What It Means"

Therefore it seems to me that, starting from this neuroscience fact (2009), most of Korzybski's general semantics (1933) could be derived. Fortunately, we don't have to do the derivation since he lived his last thirty years writing and teaching about it. And his work inspired hundreds of others who have labored to propagate the GS principles and methodologies, all for our benefit.

What **Benefit?**

My explications about the potential benefits of GS principles and methodologies are noted throughout this book. Rather than repeat them here, it might be more interesting to read what some university students have written after studying general semantics for a semester. (11)

> General semantics is by far the most relevant class I have taken toward my B.S. in Communication Studies. No other class has provoked the amount of interest and relevancy in the scope of human interaction, both interpersonally and worldly. Understanding abstraction and evaluation has been far more beneficial in comprehending human interaction than studying Maslow or Skinner.

> In a way, GS is a way of life. I realize now that there are so many things in general semantics that I can use on a daily basis. The presentations in class also proved that GS can relate to so many things that only a fool could argue that it is not applicable to us.

> So far in my college years I have had three classes that have molded the future me. My world religion class influenced the way I perceive religion, my communication graphics class influenced the way I perceive my visual surroundings, my general semantics class influenced me in my understanding all these and realizing there is always more that meets the eye.

> I still plan to work in the communications field one day, and what I will take from this discipline into that career is, most basically, a heightened sense of awareness of both the words I choose to use and the words used by those with whom I am assigned to communicate. An awareness that the same word can mean different things to those two parties. An awareness that I can never know all about anything — and neither can anyone else. An awareness that each issue has more than one side and more than one possible solution, that no issue is black and white. An awareness that true objectivity

is unattainable and that bias must therefore be examined in all communication.

I wish I had been taught earlier about some of the general semantics principles, such as to recognize that the word is not the thing and that what we see is only a fraction of what is happening “out there” (and that what other people — namely parents, teachers, news anchors, reporters, movie directors, politicians, ministers, anyone who seems to be “all-knowing” or speak about “irrefutable truths” — see and share is only a fraction of all that occurs).

This course has given me a new lens to view life through, and has expanded what, in sociology, is called my cultural capital. Just as I have been able to relate what I learned in sociology to just about every course I have taken since then, I know that I will be able to apply general semantics principles to courses I have yet to take. I feel that I will be less susceptible to misinformation and miscommunication because I often ask myself questions such as, “So What?” and challenge myself to look more skeptically at what is presented as fact.

This class was so much different from any class I’ve taken in college thus far. In my opinion, it was a class teaching us HOW to think, rather than WHAT to think.

There is one aspect of GS that discourages me. It seems as though GS could benefit society, or even the world. Now I know that we have only discussed the tip of the iceberg, but wouldn’t we be better off if our schools actively taught this subject? Why is this a secret? Just look at the greatest problem in our world today, Iraq. If either side employed some of the approaches of GS, perhaps there would be a possibility of resolution. It would be naive, in my opinion, to think that GS could create a society without problems, but it could help.

An Overview of this Book

This book contains a compilation of articles and materials that document what I've learned to this point, and what I've modestly tried to teach. It serves as a milestone marker, a time and place for me to pause and acknowledge where I've been, recognize where I am, and determine where I want to head in the future.

As you read this book, you'll notice that a lot of it draws from my own personal, perhaps narrow, experiences. I don't apologize for it, but I realize it might seem to some different, even off-putting. However, I take heart from the words of Thoreau, who felt compelled to begin "Walden" with this pointed disclaimer:

> In most books, the I, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were any body else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience. (12)

You may also, at some point, find yourself saying to yourself, "I've already read this." Chances are you're right, because I will confess that some descriptions, examples, and even quotes, are repeated — intentionally. In my experience as both a student and a teacher of this material, I recognize that often it takes several repetitions to adequately grasp the significance of some principles, to more easily and naturally understand what "differences make a difference." Johann Goethe's observation about *progress* applies as well to learning general semantics:

> Progress has not followed a straight, ascending line, but
> a spiral with rhythms of progress and retrogression,
> of evolution and dissolution. (13)

With that as preface, here's a brief overview of what you can expect in the remaining pages of this primer for making sense of *your* world.

PART 1 Introductions to General Semantics:

- my definition(s) of general semantics (GS) as developed and taught in my university classes from 2005-2008;
- several short overview descriptions of what GS is about, what it involves, and why it matters;
- edited excerpts from three different interviews that were published in a newspaper, an online magazine, and as a paid promotional announcement for an in-flight audio magazine;
- an online tutorial I created in 2002;
- a statement from Alfred Korzybski used to begin one of his seminars that addresses "what is general semantics?";
- link to a video review that highlights several major points from my university course;
- seven stories that illustrate different principles of GS.

PART 2 Explanations and Descriptions:

- articles and reports published in *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*;
- explanations prepared for my ThisIsNotThat.com website, university classes on GS, and GS seminars;
- an excerpt from a narrated Powerpoint presentation, "Lay Off of My PERSUADE Shoes," given to the Amarillo (TX) Advertising Federation in 2009.

PART 3 Extensions and Applications:

- articles written from a GS orientation and perspective, but not necessarily about GS *per se;*
- more articles from the pages of *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*;
- selected columns written as a community columnist for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* in 2005 and 2008;
- speaking notes from a management association luncheon presentation, "How to Size Your (Thinking) Box."

PART 4 Some History:

- three articles published in *ETC* that provide some historical context regarding some of the people who have found something of significance in general semantics through the years.

SUPPLEMENTARIES:

- the full text of the 50-minute presentation, “Lay Off of My PERSUADE Shoes”;
- the “Bib-Vid-liography” listing books and video resources used in my learning and teaching;
- the book report that began my studies in GS, “An Essay on Levels of Abstractions” written in 1979.

NOTES AND SOURCES, INDEX OF NAMES:

- Notes and sources documented throughout the book have been consolidated in this final section.
- An index of names follows the notes. The Acrobat “Find” feature can be used to search for any text in the document.

PART 1
Introductions to General Semantics

General Semantics (GS) deals with the process of how we

Perceive, Construct, Evaluate, and Respond

to our life experiences. Our language-behaviors represent one aspect of these responses.

What if we could generalize the “best practices” to be learned from what the most effective:

- doctors do when they diagnose a patient’s symptoms?
- attorneys do when they cross-examine a witness to uncover the facts?
- scientists do in their laboratories when they experiment?
- police detectives do when they gather evidence at a crime scene?
- engineers do when they must design solutions to new problems?
- journalists do when they report a story?
- artists, writers, and composers do when they express their creativity?

1. We would increase our understanding and awareness of the role language and symbols play in our verbal and non-verbal behaviors.

2. We would limit the undesirable behaviors we are prone to exhibit, such as:
   a) jumping to conclusions,
   b) holding unrealistic expectations,
   c) not recognizing the hidden assumptions and premises upon which we unknowingly act,
   d) making broad generalizations and promoting stereotypes,
   e) confusing our own inferences, opinions and beliefs as facts or 'truths',
   f) resisting change or failing to adapt to change,
   g) engaging in and perpetuating language habits that are more medieval than modern,
   h) responding to labels and categories rather than specific individuals and events,
   i) feeling 'victimized' by those who push our buttons, condition our wants, and propagandize our political sensibilities.

3. We would increase those productive behaviors such as:
   a) thinking-feeling-acting in the here-and-now, moment-to-moments of daily living rather than re-living the past or dreading the future,
   b) appreciating and promoting individuality and diversity,
   c) thinking, speaking, and listening more deliberately, critically, and productively,
   d) more effectively solving problems, resolving conflicts, and maintaining relationships,
   e) integrating and building upon all our sources of knowledge, and sharing that knowledge; in other words, *time-binding*.

General semantics, formulated by Alfred Korzybski in his 1933 book, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems*, is based on underlying premises, some of which include:

- We live in a continually-changing, process-oriented world, much of which we have no means of directly observing or experiencing.

- What we do experience is therefore partial and incomplete; we abstract only a small portion of what's there — and there is always more that we do *not* perceive and abstract.
- Different people abstract differently from their own individual experiences, based on their backgrounds, capabilities, interests, biases, etc.
- As we become more conscious of this abstracting process, we learn how to become more tolerant and accepting of our own, and others, limitations and potentialities.
- We recognize the distinctions between the sensory or non-verbal world in which we sense and experience, and our verbal world in which we use symbols and language to talk about our experiences and what they mean.
- Our language ought to reflect what we collectively know and understand about our common world.
- The methods of a scientific approach provide us with a basis for evaluating and modifying our attitudes, behaviors and beliefs: 1) Observe 2) Assume 3) Test 4) Revise (repeat).
- It's important that we look for similarities among differences, and that we look for differences among apparent similarities.

If you deliberately apply these principles, the potential consequences may include:

- More effective, discriminating communications with others, and with yourself.
- More appropriate, and desirable, reactions, responses and adjustments to the inevitable "accidents waiting to happen" in your four 'worlds'.
- A more tolerant, inquisitive, open-minded, matter-of-fact outlook that is less prone to prejudice, stereotyping, and dogmatic generalizations.
- A greater degree of moment-to-moment awareness of your own, and others', different perspectives.

How Language Matters

With language we can …	and we can also …
• speak, write, read, and listen • think and express our feelings • analyze and solve problems • establish rules, regulations, laws, policies, procedures, ordinances, and standards • reach compromises, agreements, settlements, resolutions, and contracts • understand, to be understood, and to pass on our understandings to others • dream, imagine, contemplate, cogitate, deliberate, create, innovate, and ponder.	• mislead, misinform, and misunderstand • deny, suppress, inhibit, prohibit, and limit what others do and say • rule, dictate, terrorize, intimidate, indoctrinate, and alienate • generalize, categorize, stereotype, pigeonhole, and profile • lie, cheat, steal, quibble, libel, slander, sue, and defraud • perpetuate myths, superstitions, prejudices, feuds, and atavistic traditions • create and exacerbate fear, anxiety, regret, guilt, jealousy, paranoia, suspicion, and hate.

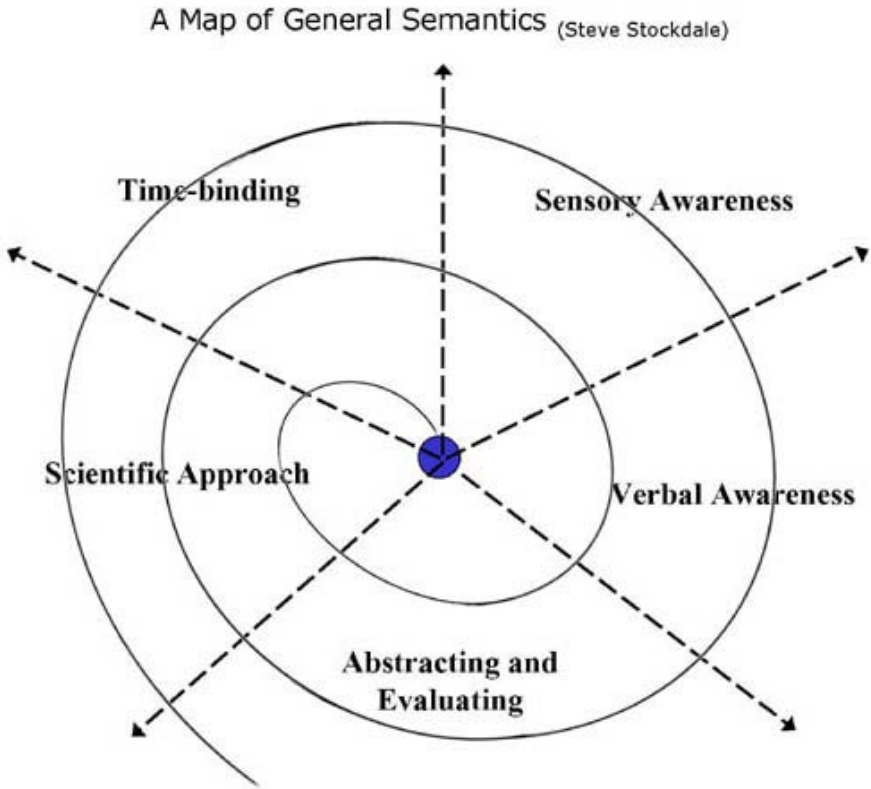
Language plays a tremendous role in human affairs. It serves as a means of cooperation and as a weapon of conflict. With it, men can solve problems, erect the towering structures of science and poetry — and talk themselves into insanity and social confusion.

Irving J. Lee

A Structured System of Formulations

Based on my own understanding and analysis of the GS formulations, I proposed an organizing structure (taxonomy) for a teaching curriculum that considered these five major topics:

- **Time-Binding**
- **Scientific Orientation**
- **Abstracting/Evaluating**
- **Verbal Awareness**
- **Sensory Awareness**



Beginning with this structure of five major topics, I've summarized the key points of what I would describe as the **Basic Understandings** of general semantics.

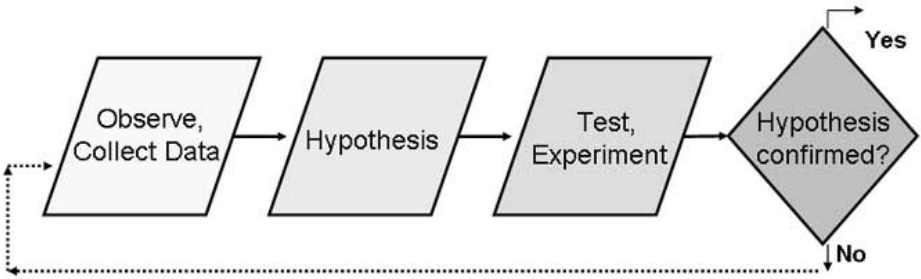
Time-Binding — Through our use of languages and symbol systems such as music, math, art, etc., we can facilitate learning between people, and between generations of peoples, that results in ever-expanding human progress. We can also, however, use such symbol systems to perpetuate atavistic feuds, myths, superstitions, prejudices, etc., that result in conflict, suffering and death. What accounts for the difference in our ability to progress technologically and inability to progress sociologically?

- Only humans have demonstrated the capability to build on the knowledge of prior generations. Alfred Korzybski referred to this capability as ***time-binding***. We 'bind time' when we use language and symbols to organize and pass along knowledge from one generation to the next, as well as within a generation.
- Language serves as the primary tool that facilitates time-binding.
- Time-binding forms the basis for an ethical standard by which to evaluate human behavior. To what degree does the action or behavior promote, or retard, time-binding?
- Acknowledging our time-binding inheritance dispels us of the 'self-made' notion and encourages us to 'time-bind' for the benefit of those who follow.

Scientific Orientation — The methods of science that have resulted in four centuries of advancement in medicine, engineering, physics, etc., have application for us in our daily lives. From our day-to-day experiences, we gather information, form opinions and beliefs, gather more information, form more opinions and beliefs, etc. Does the information we gather from our daily experiences support our beliefs and opinions? Do we modify those beliefs and opinions when the 'facts' of our experiences warrant?

Do we apply what we 'know' about ourselves and the world around us in our daily living?

- Our ability to time-bind is most evident when we apply a scientific approach, method or attitude in our evaluations and judgments.
- A scientific approach involves the process of continually testing assumptions and beliefs, gathering as many facts and as much data as possible, revising assumptions and beliefs as appropriate, and holding conclusions and judgments tentatively.
- Hidden, or unstated assumptions guide our behavior to some degree; therefore we ought to make a special effort to become more aware of them.
- We live in a process-oriented universe in which everything changes all the time. The changes may not be readily apparent to us if they occur on microscopic, or even submicroscopic, levels.
- We should remember that there is always more going on than we can sense or experience.



Even if testing confirms the hypothesis, continue to make observations, collect data, and check to see if the hypothesis remains valid or should be revised.

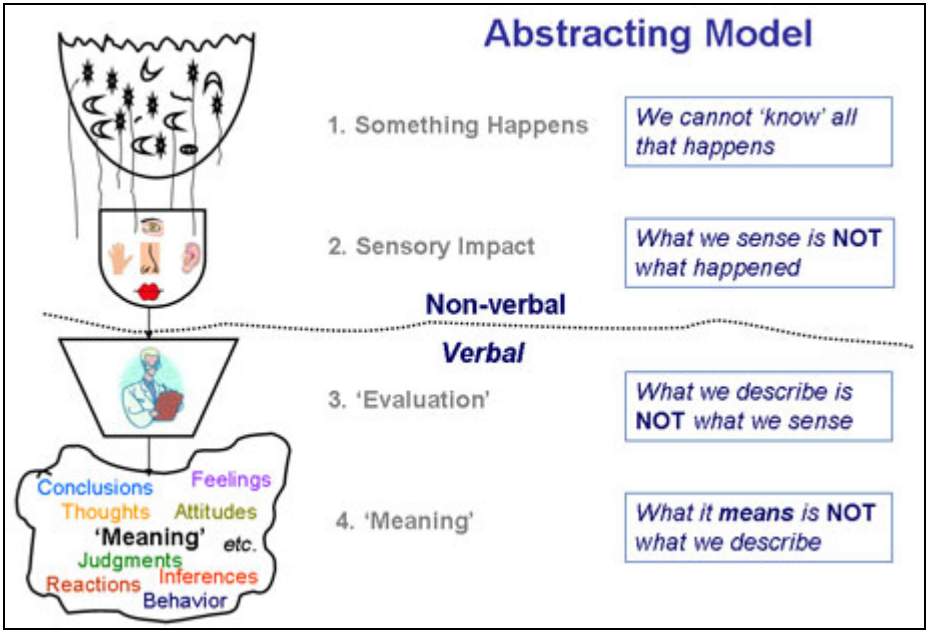
One test is worth a thousand expert opinions.
Anonymous

Abstracting/Evaluating — Our day-to-day experiences are partial and incomplete abstractions of all that we could possibly see, hear, touch, taste or smell. Therefore the opinions and beliefs (or evaluations) we derive from those experiences ought to be tempered with some degree of tentativeness, uncertainty, and *to-me-ness*.

- As humans, we have limits as to what we can experience through our senses. Given these limitations, we can never experience 'all' of what's 'out there' to experience. We abstract only a portion of what's 'out there.'
- Our awareness of 'what goes on' outside of our skin, is not 'what is going on;' our awareness of our experience is not the silent, first-order, neurological experience.
- Given our ever-changing environment (which includes ourselves, and our awareness of ourselves), we never experience the 'same' person, event, situation, 'thing,' experience, etc., more than once.
- To the degree that our reactions and responses to all forms of stimuli are automatic, or conditioned, we copy animals, like Pavlov's dog. To the degree that our reactions and responses are more controlled, delayed, or conditional to the given situation, we exhibit our uniquely-human capabilities.
- We each experience 'what's out there' uniquely, according to our individual sensory capabilities, integrating our past experiences and expectations. We ought to maintain an attitude of 'to-me-ness' in our evaluations of our own behavior, as well as in our evaluations of others' behavior.

We see the world as 'we' are, not as 'it' is;
because it is the **I** behind the 'eye' that does the seeing.
Anais Nin

We *see* what we see because we *miss* the finer details.
Alfred Korzybski



Verbal Awareness — Language provides the primary tool for time-binding, for advancing progress within societies and cultures, as well as enabling individuals to adjust, adapt, survive and thrive within an increasingly chaotic verbal environment. We are, for the most part, unaware of the effects of our verbal environment on how we react to our daily experiences. How often do we react to words, labels, symbols and signs as if they were the 'real' things represented? Do we use language, or are we used by language? Who rules our symbols?

- We can think of language as the unique capability that allows humans to time-bind, or build our learning, from generation to generation, as well as within generations.
- However, language has evolved with structural flaws in that much of the language we use does not properly reflect the structure of the world we experience 'out there.'
- Among the mistakes we perhaps unknowingly commit:

    - confusing the word or symbol with whatever the word or symbol stands for;

- acting as if the meaning of the words we use is contained solely in the word, without considering the context and the individuals;
- confusing facts with our inferences, assumptions, beliefs, etc.;
- not accounting for the many "shades of gray," simplistically looking at things as if they were black or white, right or wrong, good or bad, etc.;
- using language to 'separate' that which in the actual world cannot be separated, such as space from time, mind from body, thinking from feeling.

- Revising our language habits by using these devices will help us become more aware and more deliberate in our everyday talking and listening. The first five of these were suggested by Korzybski and referred to as the *extensional devices*:
  - ***indexing*** : $\text{Muslim}_{(1)}$ is not $\text{Muslim}_{(2)}$; $\text{Feminist}_{(1)}$ is not $\text{Feminist}_{(2)}$;. Remember to look for the differences even among a group or category that presume similarities.
  - ***dating*** : $\text{Steve}_{(2008)}$ is not $\text{Steve}_{(1968)}$; Steve's-views-on-$\text{abortion}_{(2008)}$ are not Steve's-views-on-$\text{abortion}_{(1988)}$. Remember that each person and each 'thing' we experience changes over time, even though the changes may not be apparent to us.
  - ***quotes*** : 'truth', 'reality', 'mind', 'elite'. Use quotes around terms as a caution to indicate you're aware that there is an opportunity for misunderstanding if the term is particularly subject to interpretation, or if you're being sarcastic, ironic, or facetious.
  - ***hyphen*** : mind-body, thinking-feeling. Use to join terms that we can separate in language, but can't actually separate in the 'real' world. Remember that we can talk in terms that don't accurately reflect the world 'out there.'
  - ***etc.***: Remember that our knowledge and awareness of anything is limited. We can't sense or experience or

talk about all of something, so we should maintain an awareness that "more could be said."

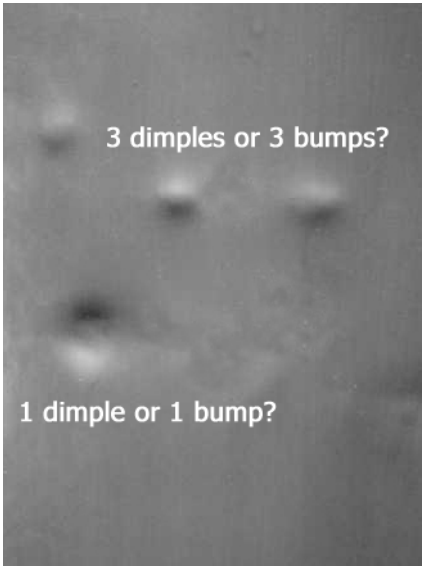
- o ***E-Prime***: eliminate or reduce forms of the *to be* verbs (*is, are, were, am, being*, etc.). In particular, reduce those that we consider *is of identity* (ex. John *is* a liberal) and *is of predication* (ex. The rose *is* red.) Championed by D. David Bourland, Jr.
- o ***English Minus Absolutisms (EMA)***: eliminate or reduce inappropriate generalizations or expressions that imply *allness* or *absolute* attitudes. Examples include: *all, none, every, totally, absolutely, perfect, without a doubt, certain, completely*. Championed by Allen Walker Read.

Sensory Awareness — You could say that we live in two worlds: our verbal world of words (and thoughts, opinions, beliefs, doubts, etc.), and the non-verbal world of our actual sensory experiences. We live on the non-verbal levels, but many times our verbal pre-occupations preclude us from appreciating what we experience on a moment-to-moment, here-and-now, non-verbal basis. To what degree do we project our verbal world of expectations onto our non-verbal sensory experiences? Do we experience 'what is going on' in the moment, or do we see what we're looking for, or hear what we expect to hear? Are we aware of ourselves, our non-verbal experiencing, and our limitations?

- We 'experience' our daily living on the silent, non-verbal levels; in other words, on a physiological-neurological level different from our verbal awareness.
- Our ability to experience the world is relative, unique to our own individual sensing capabilities.
- Our language habits can affect our physiological behavior; we can allow what we see, hear, say, etc., to affect our blood pressure, pulse, rate of breathing, etc.
- As we become more aware of our own non-verbal behaviors, we can practice techniques to achieve greater degrees

of relaxation, less stress, greater sense of our environment, etc.

As one illustration of these principles, look at the following image. This image includes what might be considered as “dimples” which appear to recede into the image, and “bumps” which appear to come out of the image. How many “dimples” and how many “bumps” do you see?



Now rotate it 180 degrees. How many “dimples” and how many “bumps” do you see from this perspective?

The Benham Disc Demonstration

This demonstration illustrates how the brain constructs our perceptions and experiences.
http://www.thisisnotthat.com/video/benham.html

For more demonstrations of visual misperceptions:
http://www.thisisnotthat.com/video/MP-koch-demo.html

Some Questions and Answers About GS

Can you explain what general semantics is?

General semantics (GS) deals with the study of language as an aspect of human behavior. It's based on the premise that language shapes, influences, and contributes to how we view the world, and how we react to events, people, etc.

How did you get involved in general semantics and the organization, the Institute of General Semantics?

In 1979 I took a graduate course in linguistics at TCU (Texas Christian University) and read S.I. Hayakawa's *Language in Thought and Action.* Hayakawa's book provided an introduction to general semantics. I was particularly struck at the time by the notion that language serves as the only means by which humans can resolve disputes, both on individual and societal levels. Then in 1993, I was a regular at a sports bar in Irving, TX, that featured a nation-wide satellite trivia game. I met another regular trivia player there named Jerry. One day we were collaborating on a trivia game and a question came up about Alfred Korzybski. We both were astounded that the other knew the answer. Jerry had actually studied GS at the University of Nebraska in the '70s. The next day he brought me two of his GS books, Korzybski's *Science and Sanity* and J.S. Bois's *The Art of Awareness*. Then he and his wife bought me a membership in the Institute that Christmas, I started receiving the journal *ETC*, and that's how I got started with the Institute.

Can you describe where general semantics sits in a broad spectrum of disciplines?

That's a good question and I think it gets into why general semantics isn't more widely known. It's truly an interdisciplinary

field that draws from and integrates aspects of language arts and communication studies, linguistics, behavioral science, physiology/neurology, the sciences, and the creative arts. It doesn't fit exclusively within any one domain, so within the academic bureaucracies you might find individual supporters and advocates from different departments. Unfortunately, without an obvious 'home,' it's been left out in many academic programs.

Would you give us a brief introduction to Alfred Korzybski?

Korzybski was born in Poland in 1879. His family owned land and were comparatively wealthy. He grew up speaking four languages since servants from Russia, Germany, and France worked on the family's estate. So from an early age, he had a sense that different languages used different words to refer to the same object. Throughout his schooling, he concentrated on mathematics, engineering, and the sciences. During World War I, Poland allied with Russia and Korzybski served as a cavalry officer in the Russian army. After surviving a major leg wound, he was reassigned to America to support artillery testing in Canada and material procurement in the U.S. He remained in the U.S. after the war ended. For the rest of his life (he died in 1950) he would be motivated by the question: *How is it that humans have progressed so far and so rapidly in fields such as engineering, mathematics, and the sciences, and yet sociologically humans still were fighting wars and killing each other?* Is it possible that the means and methods of the sciences could be applied to the fields of human behavior, psychology, politics, etc.? His landmark 1933 book *Science and Sanity* summarizes his diagnosis and his recommended prescriptions for how the methods of science can be effectively applied toward individual and societal sanity.

Can you explain the notion of time-binding for us?

Time-binding is the term Korzybski coined to describe the defining characteristic that differentiated humans from all other living things. He referred to plants as chemistry-binders, since what plants 'do' is to bind together the elements of their immedi-

ate environment (soil, nutrients, water, sunlight, etc.) to sustain and perpetuate life. He called animals space-binders because, in addition to 'binding' the same chemical elements as plants, animals have the capacity to move about in space, to hunt for plants, water, or other animals for food. Humans have the additional capability to 'bind' time through language and other types of symbols; we have the capacity to build on the knowledge and achievements of our ancestors because of language.

As Executive Director of IGS and having worked on and continuing to work so hard on *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, can you talk about the areas of interest that members touch upon in their contributions to the publication, as well as in their professional and personal lives?

Well, that's a big question and I don't think I can give you a good general answer. I'll just say that GS covers such a broad swath of intellectual interests and real-life applications that people as diverse as lawyers, doctors, artists, teachers, real estate developers, and journalists have made GS a big part of their personal and professional lives. What relevance to our day-to-day lives does the study, investigation and understanding of general semantics have? First, I'd say that there is little, if any, benefit to be gained by just 'knowing' something about general semantics. The benefits come from maintaining an awareness of the principles and attitudes that are derived from GS and applying them as they are needed. You can sort of compare general semantics to yoga in that respect ... knowing about yoga is okay, but to benefit from yoga you have to 'do' yoga. The same is true with general semantics. While there may be some satisfaction in learning and understanding the methods and principles, the real test is in the 'doing.' Some of the typical problems that may be eliminated, or at least diminished, through GS would be things like not treating an inference or opinion as if it were a fact; not jumping to inappropriate conclusions; avoiding gross generalizations and stereotypes; enjoying the individuality and uniqueness of every person and situation; delaying your reactions and not making kneejerk, emotional reactions, and recognizing that while words have certain accepted

definitions, the 'meanings' or significance of those words varies with the individual speaker, listener, and context.

How has general semantics played out in your life professionally and personally?

Well, it's "played out" for me such that it represents my full-time job. Even so, on a personal level I'm challenged on a daily basis to practice and apply what I 'know' in dealing with 'difficult' people, asking the right questions, solving problems, trying to separate what I know "for a fact" vs. the inferences I make, and so on. Generally, I think I'm able to maintain more of an even disposition, an open mind, and an attitude of inquisitiveness and tolerance when I'm consciously aware of what I'm doing and how I'm doing it. And that's a core aspect of general semantics.

I am conscious of my own limitations.
That consciousness is my only strength.

Satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment.

Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.

Like every other faculty, this faculty for listening to the still small voice within requires previous effort and training, perhaps greater than what is required for the acquisition of any other faculty ...

Mahatma Gandhi

SkyRadio: Words and language have always had enormous power in our culture. And in the information age, they're even more central to our lives. But most people don't think that much about the way that language shapes the way we think, the way we act, and the way we are.

Our next guest does. Steve Stockdale is the Executive Director of the Institute of General Semantics, and he joins us now on Sky Radio. Steve, welcome.

Steve: Thanks, Carol.

SkyRadio: So what is general semantics?

Steve: Well, first of all let me just say what it's not. It's not just a study of words, it's not a matter of using this word or that word, like you'll hear some people say in a dismissive way, "oh, it's just a matter of semantics."

What general semantics deals with is we're interested in the study of language as a form of human behavior. So we're interested in how human beings react and respond and behave based on language and symbols and other things like that.

SkyRadio: So what does the Institute do?

Steve: Well, the Institute is a member-based nonprofit organization that was established in 1938. We have about 700 members in, I think, 20 countries around the world. Our focus is on education so we do two primary things.

We offer seminars, workshops, and conferences that we sponsor ourselves. We also have a series of publications, which are primarily our quarterly journal *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, which goes to our members and it's also subscribed to by about 400 libraries around the world.

SkyRadio: Now the study of how language shapes our thinking is no doubt of considerable academic interest. But what are the practical applications of the study?

Steve: Well, for example there are several universities that teach general semantics and in fact I teach in the Schieffer School of Journalism at TCU here in Fort Worth. And one of the reasons they're interested in teaching general semantics is that we bring a particular mindset or particular point of view to the way that people evaluate what they hear, what they see, their overall experience.

Alfred Korzybski, who founded the Institute back in 1938, wrote a book called *Science and Sanity* in which one of his premises is that "those who rule the symbols rule us." And so if we aren't familiar, or aware, of the various means that people have of using and misusing language, then we're susceptible to being manipulated.

There are several questions you might want to ask yourself when you're evaluating some kind of a political speech, or rhetoric, or advertising campaign. For instance, the person that you're hearing, are they confusing facts with inferences or assumptions?

Are they trying to take an overly-complex subject and simplify it to the degree they reduce it to a simple either/or, right or wrong, black or white kind of a polarized choice, when in fact the answer is probably some place in the middle, or in a gray area.

Or do they attempt to attribute one cause for a very complicated set of circumstances when there could be multiple causes, many of which we may never even know about.

And then they may resort to what I call the tyranny of labels where they will reduce an argument or make a case just by using a particular word in a derogatory way. Such as you'll hear somebody say, "All you need to know about him is that he's a liberal!"

Last year here in the Dallas-Fort Worth area there was a big controversy because one of the local station's meteorologists was making a big deal about the fact that the other stations, what they were calling "meteorologists" didn't really have a meteorology degree. So is it fair for them to promote their weather forecaster as being a meteorologist when in fact they didn't have a meteorology degree?

The question is, does that label affect their forecast? Are they going to make a better or worse forecast whether or not they use that label of meteorologist vs. weather forecaster?

SkyRadio: The guys with the degree would probably say they had the leg up on that one.

Steve: Well, but then you take the person with a degree who's been out of school for a year as opposed to a weather forecaster who's had thirty years of experience but doesn't have a meteorology degree. So there are all kinds of things that factor into it other than just what's the label or what's the word you use.

So if we're not aware that these techniques are being used, then we're susceptible to being manipulated by those who are generating these words and languages and symbols.

SkyRadio: Absolutely fascinating. Thank you so much, Steve.

Steve: Thank you, Carol.

SkyRadio: We've been talking with Steve Stockdale. He is the Executive Director of the Institute of General Semantics, and we reached him in their headquarters in Fort Worth, TX.

Interview with Steve Stockdale

FORT WORTH – What do you answer when your toddler asks, "What's this?" What's likely to follow when a politician begins a sentence with: "The fact of the matter is ... ?" And what do these questions have to do with one another?

Welcome to the world of Steve Stockdale, executive director of the Institute of General Semantics. Mr. Stockdale, 52, became interested in general semantics in graduate school at Texas Christian University after graduating from the U.S. Air Force Academy. After a career in defense electronics with Texas Instruments Inc., he was researching new directions when he began volunteer work for the institute.

The institute was formed by the merger of two long-established semantics groups – one in California, one in New York – in 2004. Mr. Stockdale became its director, steering the non-profit through its relocation to temporary quarters in Fort Worth. Last fall, it moved into a renovated 1932-era grocery store in the city's historic Southside neighborhood.

It's his mission, he says during an interview at the institute, to raise the profile of this relatively little-known field of study.

For instance, he's teaching a course at TCU and working with advanced-placement English teachers from the Birdville school district.

What is general semantics?

"You can think of it as the study of how we perceive, construct, evaluate and then communicate our life experiences," he says.

General semantics is obviously very important to you. Why is that, and why should it be important to the rest of us?

The real kernel that got me hooked is that, when you think about it, language is the only means that we have to resolve problems between people. So it's really important that people have an understanding of not just the language but the mechanism of how it all works. What are the pitfalls, the limitations?

We're being bombarded by political advertising in this fall's campaigns. What should we be on guard against?

Part of general semantics deals with trying to make clearer distinctions between what's fact and what's opinion or inference. What you'll hear politicians say inevitably is, "The fact of the matter is." … You can pretty well tell that anytime someone prefaces a remark by "the fact of the matter is," what's going to follow is a firmly held conviction or opinion. It's probably not going to be a fact. So one thing I would say is be diligent in setting high criteria for what constitutes fact.

An example: Before the buildup to the war in Iraq, people would have said it was a fact that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction. They would have said that because that's what they heard. Now, there are very few people in the world who actually had the information available to say whether or not it was a fact. Everyone else was hearing reports of what somebody else said was a fact.

But the government acted as if it were a fact. If they'd said, "We're 98 percent sure … " there probably wouldn't have been the support that there was in 2003.

How do we teach young people to be critical consumers of information?

To teach it, you have to know it. So, ultimately, it's parents and teachers in elementary schools who need to understand some of these basic principles. Something as simple as this: Kids, as soon as they learn to talk, will ask, "What's this? What's that?" Don't answer, "It's a table," but, "We call it a *table*."

It seems to me that opens up several different ways to qualify this. For one, if you're growing up in Germany, they call it a *tisch*. … It brings in the notion that different cultures have different languages. The other thing it opens up is we call it a *table*, but it could be used as a seat.

So, it disassociates, ever so slightly, the thing from the word we attach to it. The earlier you start, the easier it is.

A Tutorial

How well do you integrate ... what goes on *in here* ...with what goes on *out there* ?

When we talk about wanting to become better critical thinkers, or more discriminating individuals, or simply more sane human beings, what we're talking about concerns questions such as:

- How well do we interface or relate to the world around us?
- How appropriately do we interpret what goes on **outside** our skin?
- How appropriately do we interpret what goes on **inside** our skin?
- Do we purposely and consistently apply what we 'know' about what goes on *out there* ?
- Do we purposely and consistently apply what we 'know' about what goes on *in here* ?

This short tutorial will re-acquaint you with some notions you may find familiar, or 'obvious'. Perhaps it will introduce you to some new ways of thinking about things. And perhaps the resulting implications will enable you to become more critical, more discriminating ... and, perhaps, eventually more sane.

What goes on ... *out there* ?

Regardless of race, religion, nationality, or culture, we should be able to agree on some key facts:

- We live in a **process-oriented** universe; everything is changing all the time.
- With our **human limitations**, we can't experience much of what we know goes on; e.g., high frequency sounds, radio waves, infrared light, etc.
- Events happen in a certain **order**, and in **relationship and structure** to other events.
- Not only do things and events continually change, but their **environments** continually change as well.

What goes on ... "in here"?

Likewise, we should be able to agree on certain facts regarding what happens inside our skin, or nervous system, in response to what happens *out there* :

- We can't experience everything; we **abstract** only those events and characteristics we can, and choose to, experience.
- As each individual is **unique** from anyone else, each nervous system is also different.
- We each **construct**, from our own unique nervous system activities, our own individual sense of experiencing what's *out there* .
- It follows that each individual's experience of what goes on will be different from everyone else's.
- Our *in here* experiences, reactions, and responses **are NOT** the same as what actually happens *out there* .

Integrating and summarizing ...

1. We live in a continually changing process-oriented universe; "You can't step into the same river twice," as Heraclitus observed.
2. Physically, we are not equipped to experience much of what we know goes on around us.
3. Events happen in relation to other events, in a certain order, according to certain structures.
4. Not only do things and events continually change, but their environments continually change as well; "nothing happens in a vacuum."
5. We abstract only those events and characteristics we can, and choose to, experience.
6. Each individual's nervous system is unique.
7. Each individual experiences what goes on differently, to some degree, from everyone else.
8. Our abstractions from what we experience are NOT the same as what actually happens *out there*.
9. We each react uniquely to what goes on; what goes on does NOT determine how we react.

What's your orientation, or "world view"?

Based on your own individual life experiences, which occurred in your own unique environments and contexts, you have developed what might be termed your own personal approach to things.

You might call this your orientation, or approach to life, or *world view* (in German, *Weltanschauung*). How you respond, or react, to what happens in your life will be determined in large part by how you view your world — your underlying premises, assumptions, beliefs, etc.

Therefore, we each need to carefully consider and become conscious of our own individual orientation towards how we approach our life experiences.

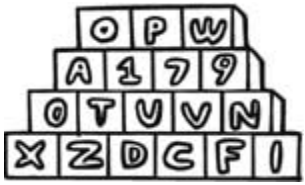
How would you define your own *world view* or *orientation*?

One approach to assessing and expressing this type of orientation is to consider the hundreds of aphorisms, clichés, or "conventional wisdoms" that we grow up with. For example, to what degree would you agree, or disagree, with statements such as:

- You're either with us or against us.
- You can't change human nature.
- Everything happens for a reason.
- The majority is usually right.
- You should expect miracles.
- Men are from Mars, women are from Venus.
- To thine own self be true.
- Everybody has a right to his/her own opinion.
- Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.
- You can't teach an old dog new tricks.
- Clothes make the man.
- You should love the sinner, but hate the sin.
- Time heals all wounds.
- In the end, we all get what we deserve.
- Image is everything.
- You get what you expect.
- The more things change, the more they stay the same.
- Perception is reality.
- Actions speak louder than words.
- Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.
- It's all good.

Consider the consequences of these statements in terms of how you react to events in your life. If you agree, or disagree, with the statement, do you also agree, or disagree, with the logical consequences of that statement applied to your experiences?

"Building Block" Analogy vs. "Spiral" Analogy



Typically, we grow up with a view of learning using the building blocks analogy. ("Analogy" refers to those instances when we say something *is like* or *similar to* something else.)

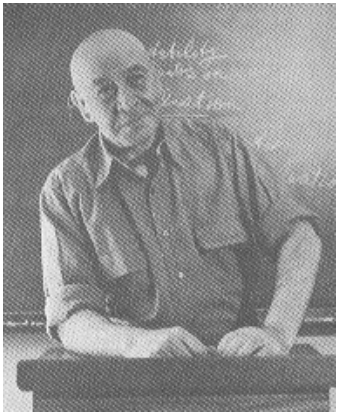
With this view, we tend to see things in a segregated, compartmentalized structure. For example, in grade school we learned our alphabet (a block of letters), our numbers (a block of numbers), how to spell (blocks of letters), etc.

However, if we apply what we 'know' about what goes on around us, we can choose to use a more appropriate analogy: we tend to learn in more of a spiral pattern than simple building blocks. In this spiral nature of learning, we acknowledge:

Just as the spiral expands from the center, our learning is continual and never-ending. As we learn about one thing, we enable ourselves to learn more about something else, from a slightly — or dramatically — different perspective. What we learn relates to what we've already learned, and what we've yet to learn, just as the spiral connects, or relates, one region to another. The spiral more appropriately implies the continually-changing and more complex nature of ourselves and the world around us.

Time-binding

We often overlook, forget, or ignore the fact that much, if not most, of what we've learned, we've learned from someone else. Parents, teachers, friends, authors, composers, historians, scientists, and countless others have provided each of us with a vast array of accumulated knowledge. This continual passing of knowledge from one generation to the next has facilitated the evolution of human progress.



Alfred Korzybski used the term *time-binding* to refer to this unique human capacity for picking up where prior generations left off, for building on the accumulated knowledge of our parents, and their parents, and their parents, etc.

He attributed this time-binding capability to the fact that we can use, manipulate, record, document, and exchange information through language. Language serves as the tool which enables and facilitates time-binding.

Time-binding implies much more than simply the ability to communicate. After all, we know that many animals can communicate on rudimentary levels. To Korzybski, time-binding denoted the critical distinction between humans and lower forms of animals.

Based on years of research, observation, and contemplation, Korzybski concluded that for humans to most effectively *time-bind*, we must use more appropriate language when communicating with others, and especially when we communicate with our own selves.

What is “more appropriate” language?

Earlier we discussed the need to properly integrate what happens outside of our skin with the we way we internally perceive, construct, evaluate and respond to those happenings within our nervous systems. Similarly, it makes sense that we strive to properly integrate, or structure, our verbal language to appropriately represent the non-verbal events and happenings which are NOT words.

The *map* ... is NOT the *territory*

Just as a well-drawn map depicts, represents, illustrates, symbolizes, etc., an actual geographic area, so should our language properly reflect that which it refers to — that which is NOT language. However, we often confuse the words we use with those 'things' the words refer to. We confuse the word with the thing; we mistake the map as the territory.

We do well to remember:

1. The structure of our **language** (the 'map') should be similar to the structure we find in the **non-verbal world** of not words (the 'territory').
2. Language is an aspect of **human behavior**; language does not exist outside of the individual humans who use words, sentences, statements, questions, etc.
3. When we forget (or ignore) this simple principle, we inevitably **create** problems, stress, and misunderstandings — with others, and with ourselves.

(Some) Common language traps

1. The subject/predicate grammar form misrepresents what we know goes on in the non-verbal world, *e.g.*

   "Roses are **red**."

   We have learned to think of "red" as an attribute, or quality, in the rose itself. However, given our current understanding of how our nervous systems work, it's more appropriate to think of "red" as a product, or construct, of our own individual eyes, brain and nervous system:

   "Roses appear **red**, to me" or "I see the roses as **red**."

2. We tend to think in terms of opposites, or two-valued differences:

   right / wrong, black / white, good / bad, for / against

   In the non-verbal world around us, we seldom encounter such clear-cut differences. Instead, we actually experience things, events, happenings, etc., along a spectrum, or a continuum, with lots of "gray area" between the extremes.

more *white* ⟵ more *black*
more *good* ⟵ more *bad*
more *for* ⟵ more *against*
more *right* ⟵ more *wrong*

3. We often confuse statements which sound like facts, as facts.

   Rather than maintain a sense of tentativeness and uncertainty, we're quick to accept statements, comments, judgments, opinions, beliefs, etc., as 'facts' or 'truth'. This lack of discrimination, this disregarding of key differences, results in our acting and behaving as if we're responding to 'facts', when we're really responding based on assumptions, inferences, beliefs, etc. Professor Irving J. Lee (1909-1955) of Northwestern University, proposed a high standard for considering something as a *fact*, vs. an *inference*:

Facts	Inferences
Can be made only after an observation, experiences, etc.	Can be made anytime, including the present and future
Stays with what can be observed, does not speculate or presume.	Goes beyond what is observed, speculates as to intent, motivation, meaning, etc.
As close to certainty as humanly possible; *would you bet your life on it?*	Expressed in degrees of probability, potentiality, etc.

False facts are highly injurious to the progress of science for they often endure long; but false hypotheses do little harm, as everyone takes a salutary pleasure in proving their falseness; and when this is done, one path toward error is closed and the road to truth is often at the same time opened.
Charles Darwin

Try a simple test to distinguish facts from inferences.

An Uncritical Inference Exercise
Based on the work of William V. Haney

Carefully read the brief story that follows. Assume that all of the information presented in the story is definitely accurate and true. Next, read the statements following the story. If the statement is definitely true based on the information presented in the story, mark the statement with a "T". If the statement is definitely false based on the information presented, mark the statement with an "F". If the true or false answer cannot be determined based on the information presented, mark the statement with a "?".

Stephanie and her friend walked into the music store after lunch. Stephanie wanted to buy the new CD by the group, "No Girls Allowed". There was only one other person in the store when Stephanie and her friend arrived. Stephanie asked, "How much is this CD?" Stephanie's friend said, "Here, let me see it. I don't think he heard you. This tag says it costs $11.99."

	True	**False**	**?**
1. Stephanie wanted to buy a CD.			
2. Stephanie and her friend ate lunch together.			
3. Stephanie owns a CD player.			
4. There was only one boy in the store.			
5. Two girls walked into a music store.			
6. There are no boys in the "No Girls Allowed" group.			
7. Stephanie and her friend are teenagers.			
8. The store's owner didn't hear Stephanie because the music was too loud.			
9. Stephanie had enough money to buy the CD.			
10. The "No Girls Allowed" CD cost $11.99.			
11. The owner of the store is a woman.			
12. Stephanie wanted to buy a CD as a gift.			
13. One of the CDs costs $11.99.			
14. There were two boys in the store.			
15. The clerk was hard of hearing.			

Did you notice how you projected information into this simple story which wasn't stated as 'fact'? In every encounter or situation we face, we bring our past experiences to it in the form of

unstated, usually unconscious assumptions and premises. We draw inferences based on these assumptions about the situation as if they were fact. Many times we cause problems for ourselves and others when we confuse our inferences with the 'facts', and when we don't recognize our projections as projections.

4. Although we would immediately deny it, most of us react to what's been called *word magic*. We believe that if there's a name for something, or a word for something, then that something must be 'real'. Otherwise ... why would somebody have gone to the trouble to make up the word?

   This unrecognized, perhaps unconscious, belief in *word magic* has facilitated the continuation of myths, superstitions, hexes, curses, jinxes, etc. We talk about something *as if* it exists, and describe it in great detail with other words, and draw pictures of it, and then begin to act *as if* it exists.

   For example, you no doubt would say that unicorns are not real; they don't exist. And yet, you know what one looks like, you'd clearly recognize one if you saw one. In fact, would you even be surprised if you saw a sign in a zoo for the "Unicorn Display"?

   We also practice *word magic* when we respond to labels — especially those with political, religious, racial, ethnic or sexual implications — without regard for the context or intended meaning. Some people will immediately react with discomfort upon hearing, or reading, certain words: *liberal, right-winger, pro-choice, nigger, spick, kike, Bible-thumper, faggot, dyke, mick, wop, bitch* ...

   We even respond physiologically to words. Have you ever eaten something unfamiliar, then had a negative reaction when you learned what it really 'was'?

Integrating and Summarizing

1. Language enables **time-binding**, allowing humans to build on the knowledge or prior generations.
2. However, we need to be aware that **languages are not perfect**, but very imperfectly-developed human tools.
3. The **subject/predicate** grammar form, in many cases, misrepresents what we know about the world around us.
4. We tend to use **either-or, two-valued terms** describing polar opposites, instead of more appropriate relative terms.
5. We often confuse **inferences** (assumptions, opinions, etc.) with facts, and create troubles when we act on inferences as if they were **'facts'**.
6. Language allows us make up fantasies that we can think of as ***word magic***, yet talk about them as if they existed.
7. We continue to pass along, and believe, superstitions, jinxes, myths, etc. We mistake the word as the thing, and react to the word **as if** it were the thing
8. We think of **words themselves** as having meaning, when it's the speaker who attempts to convey meaning, and the listener who interprets and derives meaning

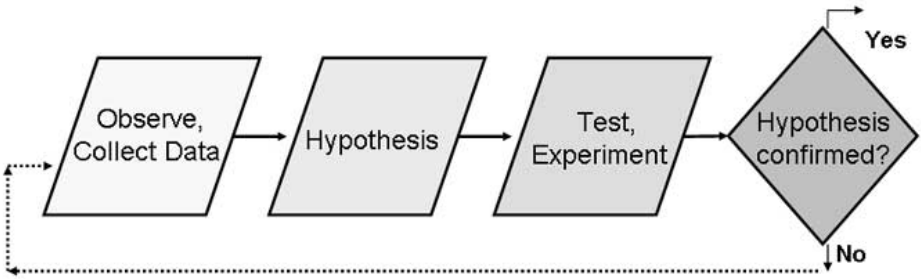
A Scientific Approach to Thinking and Living

You probably don't think of yourself as thinking like a scientist. But neither do you probably think of yourself as a Neanderthal, or even a medieval, thinker. What's the difference?

Scientists follow an approach, or method, which generally includes these types of behaviors:

1) Observe, collect data;
2) Make a hypothesis, or assumption;
3) Test the hypothesis, challenge the assumptions;
4) Revise the hypothesis as appropriate;
5) Repeat as necessary or appropriate.

The key is that, to most appropriately think and behave, according to what we know about what goes on around us at the close of the 20th century, we need develop this scientific approach in our daily living. We need to observe before we conclude, test before we judge, challenge before we believe, and always be willing to revise our assumptions and beliefs as new observations and information warrant.



Summary

- What we *perceive and construct* as what is going on 'out there' is not the same as what is actually going on; we cannot perceive all of what is going on.
- What goes on 'out there' and what goes on 'in here' must be integrated as unique, ever-changing, never-repeating experiences by each individual.
- Each of us has our own 'world view', developed in the context of our previous experiences and environments. This 'world view' shapes how we react and respond to the events we encounter.
- What we 'know' is the result of structuring, relating, and revising our prior 'knowledge' with new experiences.
- Languages enable and facilitate our learning. Language is the means by which humans build on the achievements of prior generations, what we call ***time-binding.***
- However, language itself is not perfect; it allows structural errors which permit humans to distort and misinterpret what is going on.

- Effective language use is that which is similar in structure to the non-verbal referent to which it refers; *similar*, but not *the same as*, just as "*the map is not the territory.*"
- We need to become aware of and avoid: subject/predicate misrepresentations; either/or two-valued attitudes; mistaking inferences as 'facts'; and *word magic*.
- We can apply a scientific approach in our daily life by continually challenging our assumptions and beliefs, and revising them as new facts and data warrant.

What is General Semantics? Why GS? You should get from the beginning a type of reaction. One of the main points is how the reaction can be molded. When we come to the problem of meaning, significance, etc., we are up against every kind of human difficulty.

In revising semantics, I am adding the word *general*, and also have enlarged the meaning in the sense that it turns out to be a general theory of values; *evaluation*.

In our seminars we investigate the factors of *evaluation*. If evaluation of any subject is correct, could you then have *predictability*? Have you a sort of feeling or orientation of what it would mean to you in your private life if you could predict that if you did so and so, such and such would happen? Don't you begin to see that your future happiness depends on whether we can have *predictability*?

When you calculate a bridge, you are actually talking to yourself about the bridge; you automatically get predictability about your bridge. Then our bridges do not collapse.

Now, can we do something of that sort in ordinary life? This is a very serious thing, because if we can, then we will have great benefit. If so, we can handle our lives as well as we handle our bridges and sky scrapers. Why is it that our bridges do not collapse, but our private lives do? If we are not foolish about our bridges, why are we foolish about ourselves? The question is, *do we know how to handle our brains?*

Alfred Korzybski

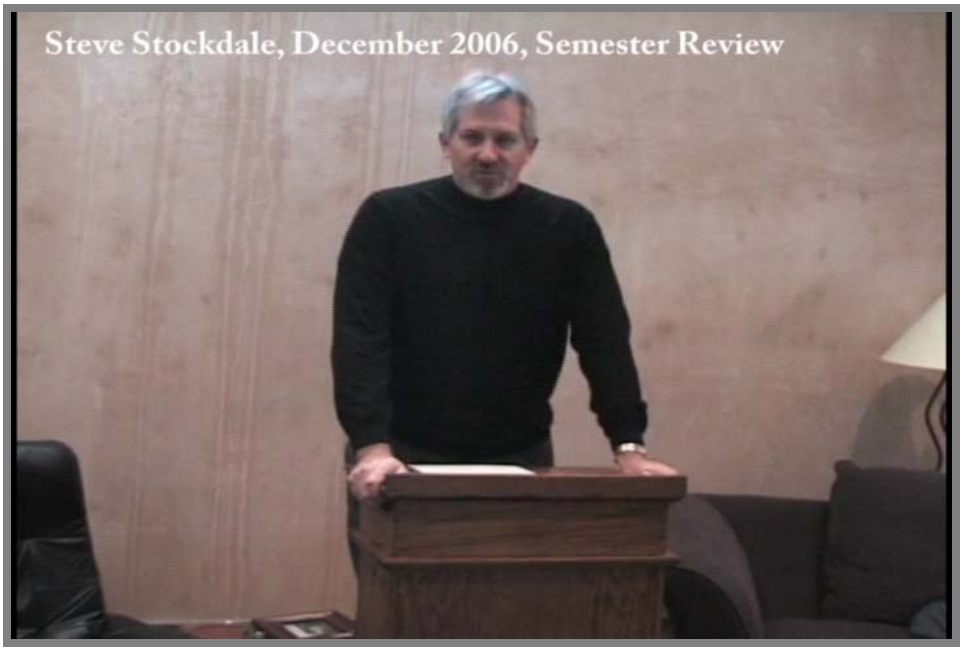
Video Reviews

These videos served as part of a course review after the final day of the Fall 2006 semester was canceled due to bad weather.

The first video provides a brief review of the Scientific Attitude, Time-Binding, and Abstracting/Evaluating (7:08). The second covers Verbal and Sensory Awareness, and Benefits (13:23).

Both videos are available online at:
http://www.thisisnotthat.com/video/MP-gs-final.html

For more online videos prepared for GS classes:
http://www.thisisnotthat.com/video/mp-gs-reviews.html



Seven Stories to Illustrate GS Principles

One of the most effective means by which one can illustrate "what GS is about" is to relate personal examples, stories, anecdotes, analogies, news reports, etc. Following are seven such stories which effectively illustrate some (not all) aspects of general semantics.

1. The "Map ≠ Territory" Analogy

Korzybski used the "map is not the territory" analogy as a fundamental principle underlying GS.

> Two important characteristics of maps should be noticed. A map *is not* the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness. If the map could be ideally correct, it would include, in a reduced scale, the map of the map; the map of the map, of the map; and so on, endlessly, a fact first noticed by [Josiah] Royce. (1)

In 1999, I drove from Texas to Chicago. While passing through St. Louis, I called some friends to meet for lunch. They gave me directions to a particular expressway intersection. I looked at my road atlas — the atlas I had owned for 20 years, the one that I'd used to drive all over the western U.S. The atlas of highway maps that had all kinds of notes and mileage and phone numbers scribbled on it. The one I would never even think about leaving at home when I traveled.

But there was a problem. The expressway intersection to which I had been directed by my friends wasn't on my map. One of the expressways did not exist when my map was published, it had only recently been constructed. My map was out of date. The

freeway system (or *territory*) had changed, but my map hadn't. I needed a new map if I wanted to meet my friends for lunch.

Too often we rely on outdated 'maps' that don't fit the current situations, circumstances, conditions, or ever-changing 'territories.'

2. Differences Between the Verbal and Non-Verbal Worlds

As *maps* are not the same as *territories*, so are *words* not the same as the *objects, things, or life events* they represent. When we act as though the words have priority over the things the words stand for, we often cause problems for ourselves, or others.

In March 2002, a 16-year-old high school honor student at L.D. Bell High School in Hurst, TX, was expelled from school for a year and sentenced to the Tarrant County Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program.

His offense? He had helped his parents move his grandmother's belongings on a Sunday afternoon. The next Monday, while his pickup truck was parked in the school parking lot, a security guard found a bread knife in the bed of the truck.

Local newspapers reported that the school district administration insisted that the young student had been expelled for bringing a "weapon" onto campus.(2) In the wake of the 1999 Columbine high school murders in Colorado, a Texas Education Code statute mandated a "zero tolerance" one-year expulsion from school. The law explicitly defined by statute what constituted a "weapon." The bread knife, the common tableware type of knife, met the statute's definition of a "weapon." Therefore, by the school district's interpretation of the state statute, the student "brought a weapon onto campus."

Not only did the student bring a "weapon" (by definition) onto campus, but according to one school district official, by the very act of bringing the "weapon" onto campus (in the bed of his truck in the student parking lot), "I do feel he put students at risk, whether he knowingly did that or not." Of course this benign bread knife, hiding in the bed of a pickup truck in the far reaches

of the sophomore parking lot, posed a “threat” to campus students — *by definition*.

Perhaps so in the verbal world of carefully scripted legislated words written on papers collected in notebooks stacked on shelves in offices in the state capitol. But in the ‘real world’ of real weapons, real threats, and real harmful intentions, this benign bread knife posed no threat ... other than to the future education and life for a 16-year-old honor student.

3. Symbols Have No Inherent, Inerrant Meanings

A second uncle of my great-grandfather became a graphic artist and moved to New York City as a young man. While perusing my family mementos, photos, and scrapbooks one day, I found a handmade Christmas card that “Uncle Bruce” mailed to my great-grandparents in 1924.

The card features a silhouette of a family in their decorated home, seen through the grill of a frosted window. Hanging in the window frame are several different seasonal ornaments and

symbols. Featured prominently in the center of the window, I was taken aback to see an unmistakable … *swastika!*

Was Uncle Bruce a Nazi?

Well, no. After just a few minutes of online research, I discovered that, prior to Hitler's German National Socialists appropriating the swastika symbol for its own branding, the symbol had been used as an expressive symbol for good fortune, good luck, good wishes, etc., … *for centuries*.

In fact, Rudyard Kipling featured the symbol prominently on the front covers and title pages of several early editions of his books, at least through the 1920s. Was Kipling a Nazi? Even *before* there were Nazis?

We need to remember that every symbol — every word, sign, icon, code, etc. — was created by humans. Just as there is no, to my knowledge, piece of music or art that spontaneously emanated with inherent (and inerrant) 'meaning,' there exists no symbol with *inherent and inerrant* 'meaning.' As the American pragmatist philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce put it: "You don't get meaning; you respond with meaning."

While traveling in India in 2007, I learned there is a neighborhood known as "Swastik" in the ancient city of Ahmedabad, home of Gandhi's Ashram. From a professor at a city university I heard a story that the swastika symbol, according to Indian tradition of more than three thousand years, depicted the life-sustaining image of a water wheel.

From my standpoint, I'm not particularly interested in where or when the symbol originated. I find it important to remember that the *symbol* we recognize and call a "swastika" can convey — or, perhaps more appropriately, can *evoke* — different meanings among different people in different contexts. The *symbol* itself carries no inherent meaning or sense of goodness or evil or luck. As George Carlin said of "dirty words" … *they're innocent!* It's the

people who use the words — or in this case the symbols — that you have to worry about and scrutinize. (3)

4. Definitions vs. Meaning

In *The Art of Awareness*, J. Samuel Bois describes a hypothetical situation that I've used as an example in just about every seminar or course I've taught to illustrate a key distinction between *definition* and *meaning*. (4)

Imagine a scene in a hospital examining room. There's a doctor, a patient, and the patient's wife. A lab technician knocks on the door and enters, carrying a medical folder with the patient's charts. He hands the folder to the doctor, nods to the patient and the wife, and leaves the room. The doctor silently looks through the pages of the chart. She takes a deep breath, gathers herself, and turns to the husband to say, "The tests confirm that you've got cancer."

From a strictly *semantic* standpoint, or in terms of how the word "cancer" is *defined* in a dictionary, there is likely little ambiguity or lack of understanding among the three participants in this imaginary scene. They each share a common understanding that "cancer" refers to a certain medical diagnosis that refers to certain physiological growths with certain consequences that may, or may not, be treated in certain ways, that may result in certain health outcomes for the patient.

However, the common understanding of the *definition* of what the word "cancer" refers to is not at all the same as the emotional and physiological response of each individual person in the room upon hearing the utterance, "you've got cancer." In other words, what hearing "you've got cancer" *means* to the doctor who articulates the words is something entirely different to what it *means* to the patient who hears the words. And what it *means* to the patient — his responses, emotions, feelings, thoughts, fears, etc. — is something different from his wife's responses and meanings.

"You don't get meaning; you respond with meaning."

5. Adapting to Change

During the first semester of the 1956-57 academic year, Wendell Johnson's GS class was broadcast over the University of Iowa campus radio station. Tapes of the broadcast reside in the archives of the Institute of General Semantics. (5)

In one of his lectures, Johnson described a 3-minute film made by Dr. Russell Meyers, chief neurosurgeon at the university's medical school. The film shows a little two or three-year-old girl, seated on the floor with a piggy bank and several coins in front of her. A hand appears to show her how to drop a coin in the bank. As the coin *plunks* loudly in the bank, the little girl squeals with delight. She reaches for a coin, fumbles a bit, then gets the coin to drop through the slot, and squeals again with the *plunk*. She drops more coins in the slot, one at a time, each time enjoying her success as only a child can.

After a minute or two, the hand appears again. It reaches for the piggy bank, picks it up, turns it 90 degrees to its initial setting, then places it back down. The little girl resumes her play, but now when she attempts to drop the coin as she has before, she's stymied – the slot in the bank is perpendicular to the way it was, so the coin won't drop as it did before. Frustrated, she tries several times. Then she puts the coin down, picks up a different coin, and once again tries without success to place the coin in the slotted bank.

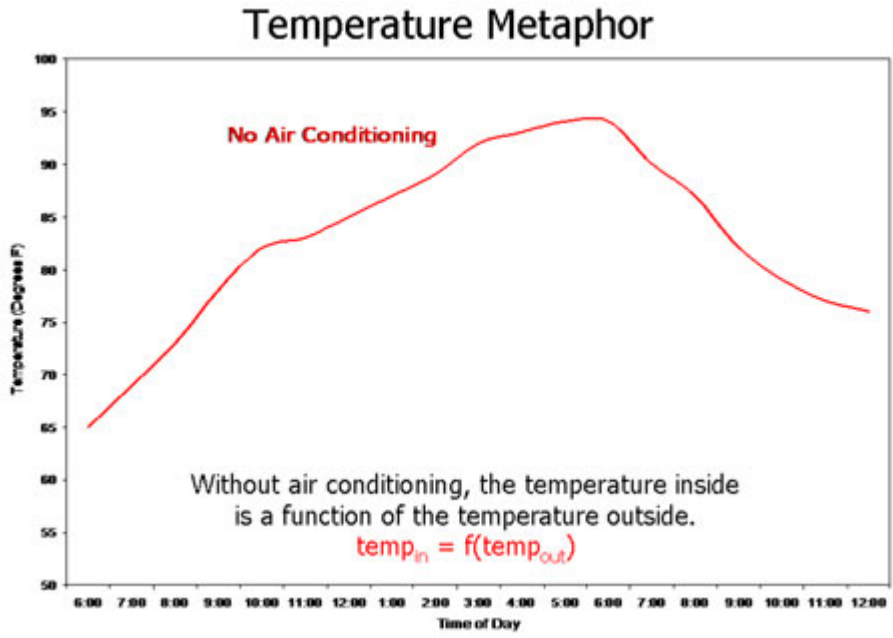
Growing more and more perturbed, the little girl then reacts in a most interesting way. She puts the coins down, reaches for the piggy bank, turns it back to its original orientation, then resumes her play. Even at that age, we seem to learn to react to change by wanting to go back, to re-make things the way they were, rather than adapting to the new situations, circumstances, or events.

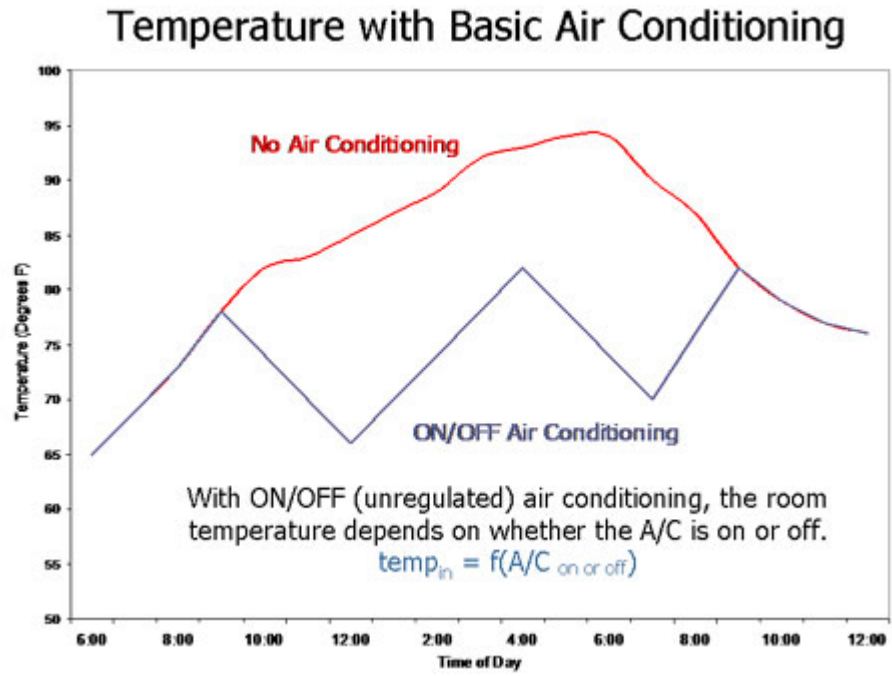
Johnson summarizes the challenges of our reactions and adjustments to changes in this way: "If we are ever to become what we might have been, we must cease being who we've become."

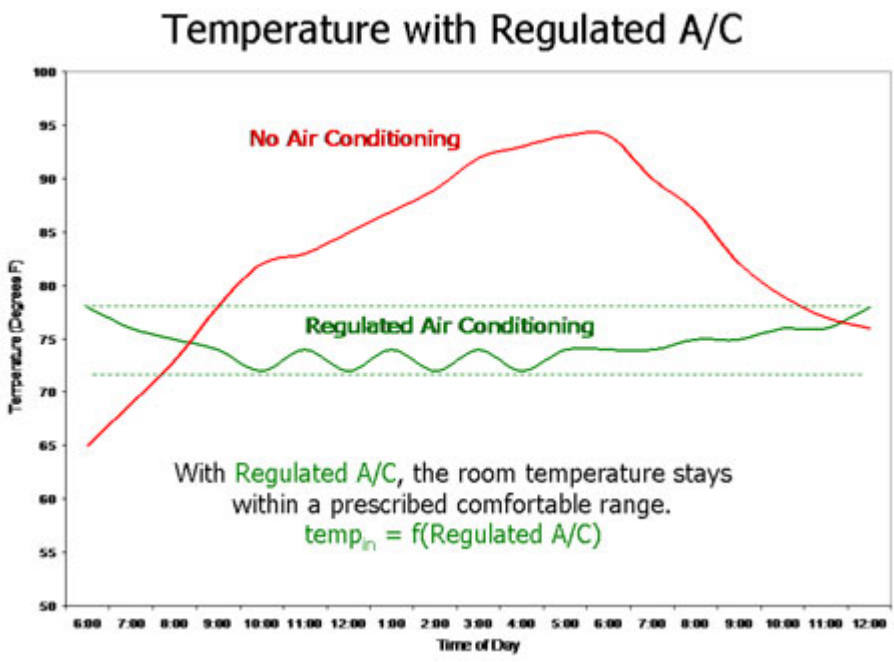
6. Benefits of Ongoing Awareness (or Consciousness)

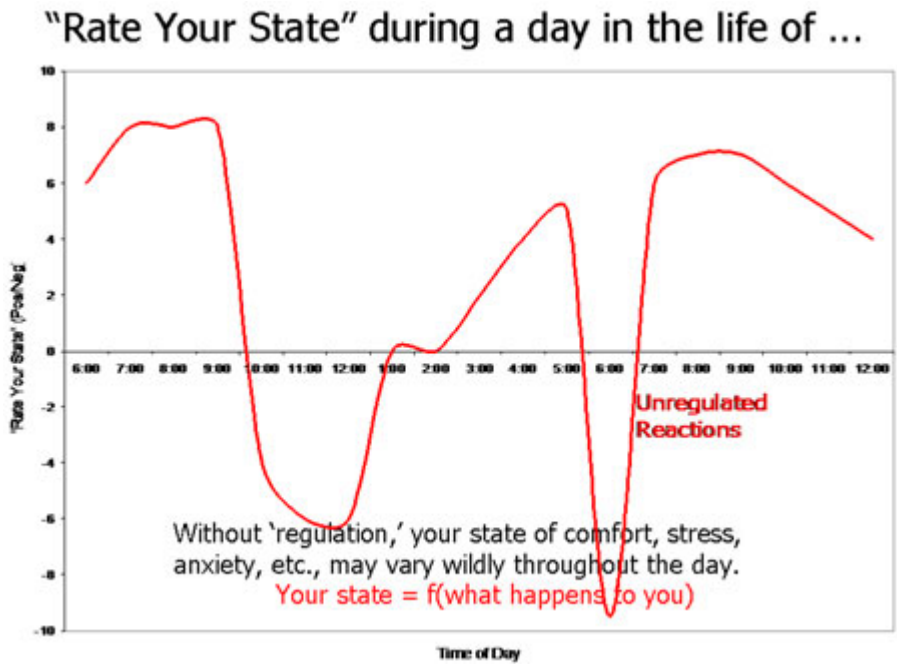
You can almost bet that in any gathering of more than a dozen people in one room, there will be disagreement as to the degree of comfort each individual experiences with respect to temperature. This inspired the following example that I've used in seminars and my university classes to illustrate two points:

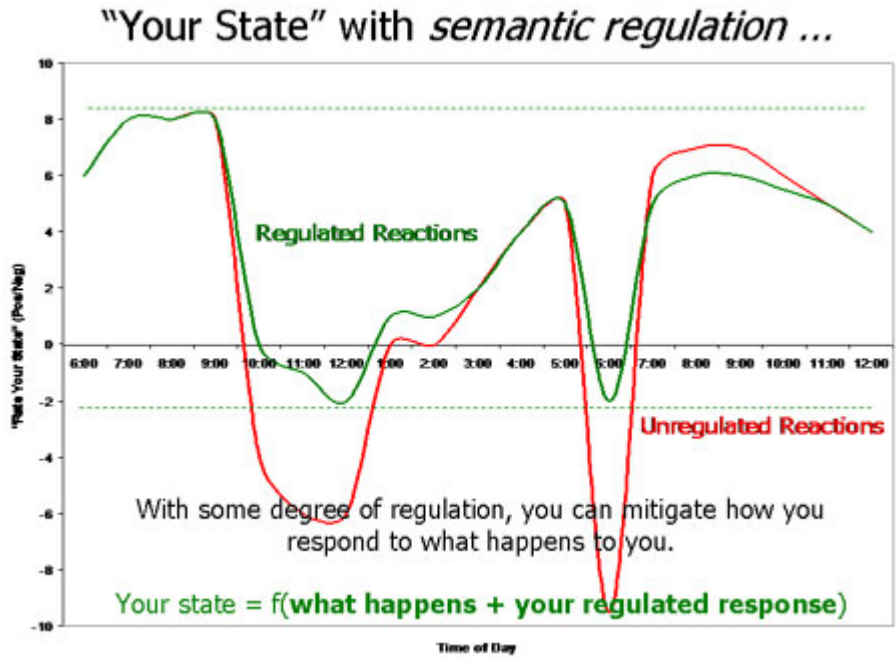
1. While we can use external, extra-sensory devices like thermometers or thermostats to give us a discreet reading of "what the temperature is" (according to a prescribed scale), that's not the same as the degree of comfort (*warmness, coolness,* or *just-right-ness*) each individual feels.
2. One of the benefits of consciously applying the GS principles of ongoing awareness is a degree of self-control or self-regulation, similar to the role that a thermostat plays in regulating an air conditioning system.

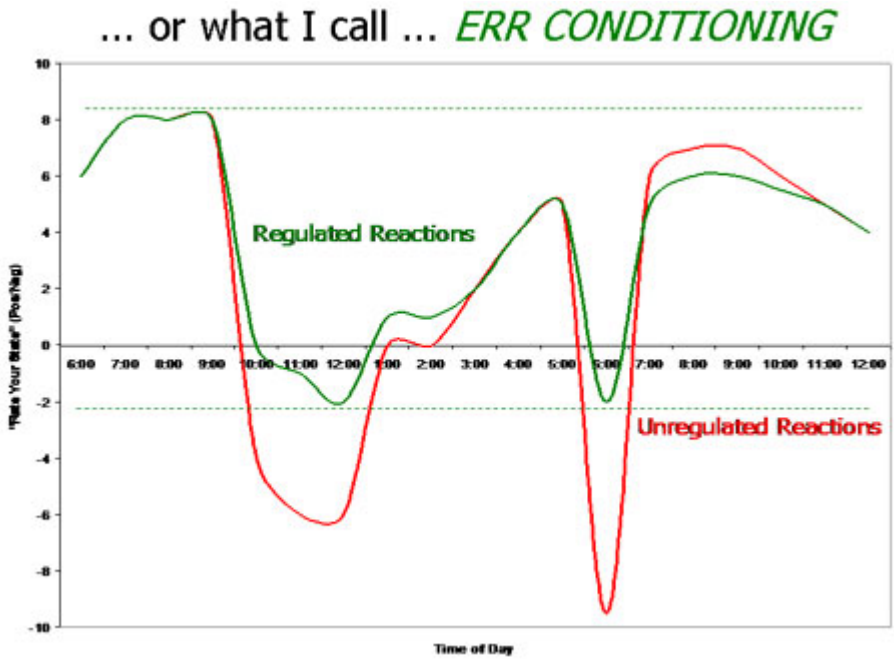



Temperature with Basic Air Conditioning
No Air Conditioning
ON/OFF Air Conditioning
With ON/OFF (unregulated) air conditioning, the room temperature depends on whether the A/C is on or off.
temp$_{in}$ = f(A/C on or off)
Temperature (Degrees F)
Time of Day


Temperature with Regulated A/C
No Air Conditioning
Regulated Air Conditioning
With Regulated A/C, the room temperature stays within a prescribed comfortable range.
temp$_{in}$ = f(Regulated A/C)
Temperature (Degrees F)
Time of Day


"Rate Your State" during a day in the life of ...
'Rate Your State' (Pos/Neg)
Time of Day
Unregulated Reactions
Without 'regulation,' your state of comfort, stress, anxiety, etc., may vary wildly throughout the day.
Your state = f(what happens to you)


"Your State" with *semantic regulation* ...
'Rate Your State' (Pos/Neg)
Time of Day
Regulated Reactions
Unregulated Reactions
With some degree of regulation, you can mitigate how you respond to what happens to you.
Your state = f(**what happens + your regulated response**)



At times the whole world seems to be in conspiracy to importune you with emphatic trifles. Friend, client, child, sickness, fear, want, charity, all knock at once at thy closet door, and say, Come out unto us. But keep thy state; come not into their confusion. The power men possess to annoy me, I give them by a weak curiosity. No man can come near me but through my act**.**

Ralph Waldo Emerson (6)

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation.... There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things.

Henry David Thoreau (7)

We cannot command the wind. But we can adjust our sails.

Anonymous (8)

7. "Common Sense" and Predictability

During a 2004 vacation in Las Vegas, I witnessed an interesting, and expensive for some, lesson in "common sense" and "predictability" while playing roulette.

Sitting near the wheel at the head of the table and focusing on the dwindling stack of chips in front of me, I didn't notice that a crowd had gathered around the table behind me, two and three people deep. Their gazes were fixed on the light board that displayed the results of the past 20 spins at that table. I looked up and recognized what they were starting at — the past six spins had come up **BLACK**. Several bystanders reached down to place bets on **RED**, including one guy who plunked down a stack of $20 bills. The ball spun landed on … **BLACK**. The dealer tallied the guy's losses — $760. The 8th spin came up **BLACK**, and the guy lost another $500. The 9th and 10th spins fell on **BLACK**, whereupon the guy muttered away from the table, over $2,000 lighter. The ball didn't land on **RED** until the 12th spin, then it started another run of **BLACK**. Over a stretch of 28 spins, the roulette ball landed on **BLACK** 25 times.

Black	RED
29	
	3
	12
4	
	27
31	
10	
10	
8	
24	
13	
15	
31	
15	
4	
22	

I was amazed that so many people did not understand the fact that each new spin of the roulette wheel was completely independent of, and unaffected by, the past results. Each new spin was equally likely to result in **RED** or **BLACK** (or **0/00,** if you know your way around a roulette table).

The guy who dropped his $2,000 stopped at the table because he could see the history of the previous spins on the electronic display, so thoughtfully placed there by the casino. For uncritical, unaware gamblers, seeing that **BLACK** had come up six times in a row … well, common sense tells you that … it's **RED** time! The casino provided the means for the $2,000 guy, and others like him, to think-feel-gamble that *they knew something about the future because they knew something about the immediate past.* That's just common sense … right?

PART 2
Explanations and Descriptions

Report from an 8-Day Seminar-Workshop

In early June 1994, I received in the mail the summer issue of *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*. Near the back cover was a notice for the 51st Annual Seminar-Workshop in General Semantics, which was to be held the last week of July at Hofstra University in New York. I read the notice and decided, at that moment, to make things happen in order to attend that seminar.

I had some strong, personal motivations for attending the summer seminar-workshop (SSW), therefore the single notice in *ETC.* was all I needed to make the decision. However, I would have appreciated any additional information which might have been available regarding the seminar. What kind of people attended? What kind of people run it? What would I get that I couldn't get from reading books? Was it worth eight days of my life? Hence the idea for this article, which is my attempt to write about what I would have wished to read about, about this time last year, about the summer seminar-workshop.

To preface, I'd like to state the semantically-correct disclaimer, which, of course, is that what follows is a necessarily general and incomplete recounting of my experiences. (Isn't it great to adhere to an orientation which not only allows, but encourages, a writer to admit up front that his/her writing is *necessarily incomplete*?) My intent is not to describe the information presented at the seminar-workshop, or explain what I learned

about Korzybski's structural differential, or reconstruct my diary for each of the eight days as in "What I Did At The General Semantics Seminar-Workshop."

Instead, what follows is my attempt to convey something about my evaluations of my SSW experiences, and a few observations. To better enable you to subsequently evaluate these necessarily incomplete conveyances, perhaps I should first tell you a little about me and what I was about prior to the seminar-workshop.

My Background

I was introduced to general semantics during a graduate course in linguistics at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth in 1979. From a lengthy reading list, I selected S.I. Hayakawa's *Language In Thought And Action* for a book report. I was impressed with the essence of Hayakawa's contention:

> that widespread intraspecific co-operation through the use of language is the fundamental mechanism of human survival, and that, when the use of language results, as it so often does, in the creation or aggravation of disagreements and conflicts, there is something wrong with the speaker, the listener, or both. (1)

I sensed what a revelation this seemingly simple message constituted, and I had numerous reactions of understanding, such as "*So that's why that happens*." However, I did not grasp the significant behavioral adjustments which were made possible, or necessary, as a consequence of applying the principles which Hayakawa presented. (Perhaps this was due to Hayakawa's lack of emphasis, or omission, on the self-reflexive aspect of the abstraction process. Read on.) After I submitted the report, I returned the book and its ideas to the TCU library to be put, literally and figuratively, back on the shelf.

For the next twelve years, I lost (or ignored) any awareness I may have had of general semantics. Into the late 1980s, however, I became quite aware that I was no longer one of Life's "happy campers." I was in my mid-30s and kept hearing this phrase

bouncing around my head: *mid-life crisis*. The more I heard it, the more 'facts' I found to justify it — I felt stifled in my marriage, I didn't find work to be at all satisfying or fulfilling, I had few friends outside of work, and I feared that the future held no promise for anything better. I began to see a psychotherapist in 1991, then separated from my wife in early 1992 and filed for divorce.

In December 1992, one of my few good friends at work persuaded me to attend The Forum, a weekend seminar run by Landmark Education Corporation, the training organization which evolved from Werner Erhard's est.

Now, you may have just experienced a semantic reaction upon reading my mention of *Werner Erhard, est*, and *The Forum*. If you did, please take a deep breath and count to ten. I'm not going very far with this, so hang in there and remember, what I'm writing about is solely concerned with *my* experience.

And my experience with The Forum was, in general, positive. The reason I mention The Forum is that, for me, what constantly showed up during three days of The Forum were ideas and examples which I recalled from Hayakawa's book. Somehow, what I finally experienced was the personal power of broadly applying the key formulations which I had read about in Hayakawa, which I later would learn he had learned from Korzybski: *The word is not the thing. Whatever you say it is, that's not it. Events don't have inherent meanings. The meaning of words and events are generated by unique individuals in unique circumstances at specific times.*

What this GS stuff meant to me, at that particular time, was that I didn't have to be consumed with guilt over the fact that I had decided to end my marriage. *Divorce* didn't have a predetermined meaning — our daughter wasn't forever doomed to be neglected and miserable; I didn't have to walk forever with my head bowed, ashamed of taking actions to further my own personal happiness; my wife didn't have to forever grieve over what I had 'done' to her. It was certainly possible that each of these outcomes could occur, but they were not unavoidable consequences of the event called *divorce*.

I understood that applying general semantics to better communicate with others could certainly be important: to be aware of the inferences we make as distinct from facts; to be aware of what, within ourselves, we're reacting to when we respond to someone's words or actions; to be inquisitive and open-minded in our conversations with others. But, to me, this GS stuff could be most critically beneficial when applied to the conversations and communications which we have with our own selves.

I became acutely aware of how much in my life may have been different had I understood the impact of applying the notions and ideas I had read about in Hayakawa. While I could not go back and change what had already occurred in my life, I did make a commitment to myself to do what I could to share this knowledge with others in the hope that they might avoid experiences (and inappropriate evaluations) similar to mine.

After The Forum, I got Hayakawa's book again and re-read it for the first time, still unaware of general semantics or Korzybski. By October 1993, I had become a regular at a local dining and drinking establishment which catered to persons of unattached marital status. In other words, a singles bar. But, exemplifying that singles bar(1) is not singles bar(2), two of my good bar buddies happened to be a married couple named Jerry and Larraine. We had become friends as a result of playing the nation-wide satellite trivia game available in the bar.

One night, a particularly trivial trivia question prompted Jerry to start discussing his college background and he mentioned general semantics. So began a conversation which continued over several months. He lent me two of his textbooks, one of which I read twice, J. Samuel Bois's *The Art of Awareness*. The other, Korzybski's *Science And Sanity*, served as a good, heavy weight to keep the front door propped open, allowing a nice breeze to flow through my apartment while I read Bois.

For Christmas last year, Jerry and Larraine graciously provided me a membership in the International Society for General Semantics. After receiving the list of available GS literature, I bought and read several books, including *Explanations In Awareness* by Bois, *People In Quandaries* by Wendell Johnson, *Words,*

Meanings and People by Dr. Sanford I. Berman, *Teaching General Semantics* and *Bridging Worlds Through General Semantics* edited by Mary Morain, and some of *Selections From Science And Sanity*. I even bought the structural differential wall hanging.

So one might say that I was, to some degree, *into* general semantics. Therefore, my decision to attend the 51st Annual Seminar-Workshop was not difficult. My motivation included to compare my levels of knowledge, understanding and application with that of other new 'students', to better grasp how to share my experiences with others, and to 'experience' for myself the general semantics of the 'experts.'

My Evaluations

There are two evaluations of the seminar which I want to discuss. The first ($evaluation_{July\ 1994}$) is my mid-seminar evaluation which I wrote and discussed with staff member Dr. Susan Presby Kodish. The second is the evaluation which I have in my mind today ($evaluation_{October\ 1994}$).

On the Tuesday evening of the seminar, we were provided the opportunity to write down our thoughts regarding what we had experienced thus far during the seminar sessions and workshops. What I wrote and discussed with Susan was a scathing, emotional critique expressing my disappointment in the staff. While the seminar was working for me personally, I sensed that most of my fellow seminar participants were struggling, confused, and uncertain as to why they were there and what they were supposed to be getting. And I felt the staff members were contributing to, rather than reducing, the level of confusion.

Now remember that my previous experience with GS was quite personal in terms of its impact on my life. I had read the academic and theoretical aspects of GS in the books. But I had also experienced the emotional "*Ah ha!*" which enabled me, and excited me, and caused me, to shift my personal orientation in a profound way. I knew how I was prior to the reorientation, and I knew how I was afterwards, and I much preferred the latter.

What I was looking for in the GS seminar was to see how this orientation shift was realized by the GS 'experts.'

What I found instead seemed to be a good-hearted, well-intentioned staff who possessed a lot of knowledge about this general semantics stuff. Their initial sessions explained the terminology, delved into the formulations, presented the historical, scientific and philosophical basis, and introduced us to sensing (experiencing) on the silent level. What was utterly lacking, in my opinion, was any conscientious effort by the staff to encourage or address some simple questions which, I thought, were on everyone's minds but on no one's lips: *So what? Why is this GS stuff important? What do we do with it? Why is this a difference that makes a difference?*

Okay, so why did this bother me? Based on my previous experiences, I viewed the application of general semantics as more than another set of self-help 'tools' to fix problems after they occurred. To me, GS offered the possibility of profoundly reorienting how one evaluates life, relationships, meanings, etc. Therefore I saw GS as a type of boat with two purposes: 1) It provided a means to rescue people who otherwise were 'drowning' in the everyday 'sea' of turbulent and confused language and inappropriate evaluations; and 2) It provided a vehicle for enabling one to travel through waters which would otherwise be unnavigable, similar in effect to, say an ice breaker.

My frustration with the staff was that they had structured the initial seminar sessions to do a terrific job of describing the 'boat' of general semantics. They told us all about the history of the boat, who built the boat, how the boat was built, what the boat was built of, how long it was, how wide it was, the displacement, etc. What they didn't talk about was, *so what?* They didn't explain why we seminar participants might want to get into the boat, or where the boat might take us. Furthermore, they hadn't given us even a glimpse as to the reasons why they had boarded the boat — there was no personal testimony as to the benefits of being in the boat.

As a result, I felt as though my fellow participants were *missing the boat.*

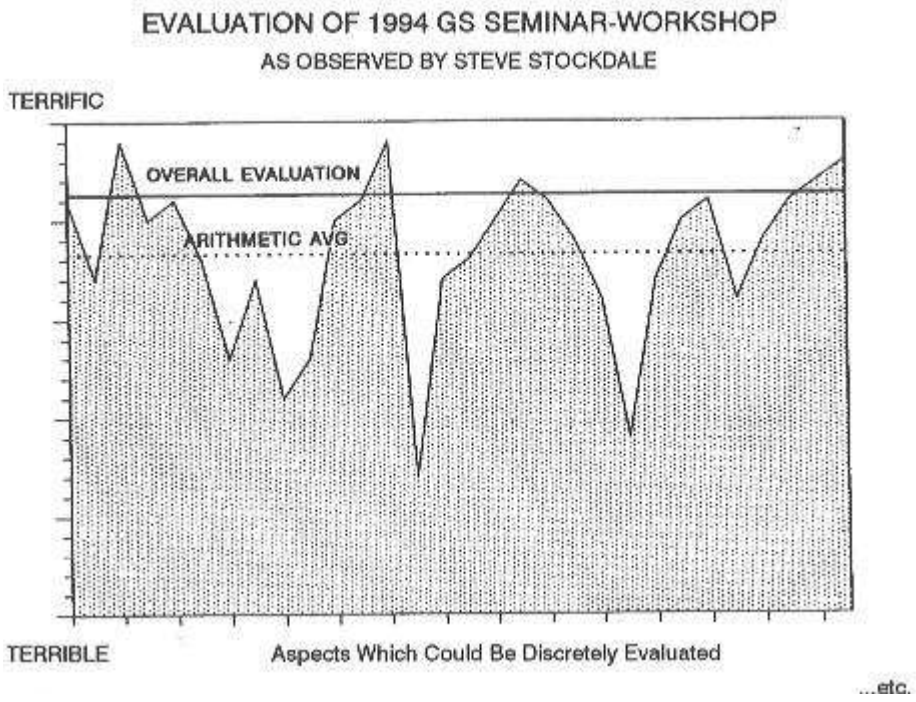
After discussing this with Susan that evening, I felt better, but I still slept fitfully that night. The next morning, I became aware that my evaluation$_{(July\ 26,\ 1994)}$ was becoming a different evaluation$_{(July\ 27,\ 1994)}$. I began asking new questions of myself, such as, "*If you think you're smart enough to see that something's missing here, why aren't you smart enough to provide it? Why are you content to wait for someone else to provide an emotional kick in the ass? If personal testimony is lacking, what's preventing you from talking about your boat?*"

And suddenly, it was crystal clear to me that: 1) it was only Day 4 of an eight-day seminar; 2) my impatience and frustration was not 'caused' by the staff, but was solely attributable to me and my reactions to the staff; and 3) in addition to playing the role of receiving participant, I could also play a role as a contributing participant.

To me, this experience was significant in the moment, as well as instructive for the future. It demonstrated that *to evaluate* is a process which can be continued indefinitely, in that we can evaluate our evaluations, and, if necessary, adjust or modify the original evaluation. Because I didn't force my evaluation$_{(July\ 26,\ 1994)}$ to be final or conclusive, I continued to inquire into my evaluating process. This inquiry resulted in asking new questions, which then served as a catalyst for creating a different evaluation, and thus a new and different experience.

Three months later, now on October 23, 1994, I have yet another evaluation. To present this evaluation, I'll attempt to apply one of the techniques presented by Milton Dawes during the SSW. The technique is the application of a calculus methodology to evaluate (or measure) something (an experience) which wouldn't ordinarily be thought of in mathematical terms.

Figure 1 graphically portrays my answer to the question, "*What did you think about the Summer Seminar-Workshop?*" While it may appear to be straightforward to those of you who work regularly with x-y graphs, let me clarify the intent.



1) The graph is notional, in that the values and axis labels are representative of a notion. They are not absolute, or in any sense do they represent 'real' values. The notion which is graphically presented is this: In the pursuit of making appropriate evaluations, one can sometimes achieve more accuracy or appropriateness if one first breaks down the overall evaluation into smaller units which can perhaps be more readily measured, then integrates the smaller units to arrive at the evaluation of the whole.

2) The x axis of the graph (the horizontal scale) represents those aspects of the SSW which I might individually evaluate, such as the staff, the course content, the presentation of material, the discussions, the other participants, the weather, the dorm, the cafeteria, the firmness of the dorm mattress, the availability of hot water in the community shower, etc.

3) The y axis of the graph (the vertical scale) represents the scale of possible ratings, in this case ranging along a spectrum with *Terrific* and *Terrible* near the two ends. (I could have just as easily made the scale from 1 to 10, had I chosen.)

4) Note that I haven't attempted to actually define each of the individual aspects which could be evaluated, nor are the relative values I've assigned meant to reflect a considered, deliberate, qualitative judgment. Again, the graph is intended to be notional, an approximate picture of my abstracted overall evaluation, as of October 23, 1994.

"*So what?*" you may be tempted to mutter. "*What does it mean? How do I interpret it?*"

First, note that for every tick mark on the x axis (representing the aspects of the SSW which I might individually evaluate), there is a corresponding value on the jagged line which denotes the rating (from *Terrific* to *Terrible*).

Next, notice that there is variability as to the ratings. Some tend downward towards the *Terrible* end of the scale, other gravitate upwards towards *Terrific*. The resulting curve (or jagged line) represents a first approximation of my overall experience at the SSW. By measuring the value of each individual aspect which is scored, a composite overall value can be determined.

Now look at the dotted line depicting the *Arithmetic Average*. This dotted line serves as a reference, indicating the straightforward, arithmetic average value derived by summing all the judged values and dividing by the number of individual aspects which were rated.

Finally, notice where I chose to place the line representing my overall evaluation. Even though I applied the calculus to make a more appropriate evaluation, my final abstracted evaluation is not simply the actual sum of the individual evaluations. As the graph shows, in my overall evaluation of the SSW, the whole is different (in this case, greater) than the sum of the parts.

Why is this so? Why isn't the total experience equal to the sum of the individual aspects? Simply because there are varying degrees of importance of the individual aspects — some are more important than others. In this particular case, the aspects which I judged most negatively (the dorm, the mattress, the cab ride) didn't carry as much weight in the overall assessment. In other words, these low scores are examples of differences which don't make a difference, or at least less of a difference.

Lest there be any doubt or confusion, I'll summarize my evaluation this way — the 1994 summer seminar-workshop was, for me, generally terrific.

A Few Observations

1) During one of the SSW sessions, Bob Pula offered this response to the question of how applying general semantics has made a difference in his life: "*I generate much less nonsense than before.*" Day by day, I'm realizing more and more how significant an accomplishment this is. His statement serves as a reminder to me of self-reflexiveness in the abstraction process. I am constantly questioning myself about my reactions to things which happen, or to things people say. Instead of asking myself questions such as, "*Why did she say that?*" I ask "*What is it that I'm responding to? What expectation did I have which was not fulfilled?*" I'm aware that, in structural differential terms, part of "what is going on" within the parabola is my observance of myself, and my reactions to my observance of myself, etc.

2) Bruce Kodish led the sessions dealing with experiencing on the silent level. One exercise was seemingly quite simple. We were told to pick out a stone, bring it to class, then for a few minutes simply experience the stone on the silent level. In other words, to use our senses without verbalizing our reactions to our senses. My inability to accomplish this simple task was enlightening. It emphasized to me how language can get in the way of our moment-to-moment experiences with "what

is going on." It also demonstrated the extent to which I generate meanings for things. While I was unsuccessful in shutting off my verbalizing, I was quite proficient in coming up with all kinds of thoughts-and-feelings-and-meanings about an ordinary, arbitrary rock. If I can 'make up' so much meaning for a random inanimate object, perhaps it would be appropriate for me to be hesitant and inquiring in my future evaluations of relationships with more animate beings.

3) Stuart Mayper led several sessions in which he, I believe, presented the scientific and philosophical basis from which Korzybski developed the system of general semantics. I say I *believe* because, truthfully, I missed a lot of what Stuart said. However, I did happen to gain two important insights during his session on views of the universe.

   In comparing the Ptolemaic or Aristotelian view of the universe (earth at the center, sun and planets in circular orbits) with the current theory (sun at the center, planets in elliptical orbits), the point was made that the orientation (or beliefs, assumptions, theories, etc) which you choose to accept as a basis will determine the questions you ask when faced with new or uncertain circumstances. In the days when man believed the planets were in circular orbits around the earth, and he observed planetary behavior which seemed to be anomalous, his analysis and inquiry was predicated on and constrained by his initial premise or belief. To be consistent with his premise, there were some questions which just could not be asked. Likewise, we today simply don't bother to ask certain questions because of what we accept as truth, due to our basic premises which determine our orientation.

   The discussion of planetary orbits also caused me to think about general semantics as an alternative orientation to what could be considered, for lack of a formal label, to be the "Common Sense, Conventional Wisdom Orientation", or CSCWO. I would make this analogy: As the current view of

the universe is to the Ptolemaic or Aristotelian, a GS orientation is to the CSCWO. Some people profess that GS offers a tool box of tips and techniques to 'fix' problems arising from CSCWO. To me, however, the ultimate value or possibility which GS offers is a complete shift of orientation such that the 'problems' which arose from CSCWO simply don't rise into one's awareness. Put another way, to me, there is limited utility for a person to cling to his/her CSCWO while attempting to use bits and pieces of GS on a case-by-case 'as needed' basis. To fully embrace the general semantics system, and derive its possibilities, you need to 'change your orbit.'

4) I observed an exchange which struck me as a terrific lesson that two people do not have the same reaction to the same event. On the last night of the seminar, one of the participants confided to me that she had been through a trying, emotional small group discussion that afternoon. She had been dealing with several personal issues during the week, and that afternoon they all seem to reach an emotional climax. The harder she tried to control and suppress the emotions, the less successful she became. As a result, she spent most of the session in troubled, anxious tears.

   The following morning, during a small group wrap-up breakfast, one of the men, who had witnessed the woman's experience, commented on it. He stated that watching her cry was a moving and meaningful experience for him, and he thought it was wonderful that she felt so safe and protected in that environment that she could be so free and open in expressing her emotions. The behavior which he inferred to be an open emotional release was, in fact, according to her, a failed attempt to control and suppress those emotions. Even though he personally witnessed the event, his conclusion regarding what he saw and inferred was false to facts.

5) After fifteen years, it was very invigorating and stimulating for me to be back on campus, in a summer camp type of atmosphere, among a group of people with at least one common and focused interest. Living in a cramped dorm room, sleeping very little but not feeling tired, reading community bathroom graffiti, even eating institutional scrambled eggs — these and similar experiences all combined to put a bounce in steps which seemed to have paced twenty fewer years.

Summary

Did I learn more about general semantics from the Summer Seminar-Workshop? Did I experience new experiences? Did I become more aware of what being aware means? Did I meet wonderful people who have studied and applied GS in their own personal lives for, in some cases, over fifty years? Did I meet fellow participants who will likely be "friends for life." Was it worth eight days of my life?

Yes!

The voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks. See the line from a sufficient distance, and it straightens itself to the average tendency. Your genuine action will explain itself, and will explain your other genuine actions. Your conformity explains nothing.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (2)

My ME Model

In the three months since I accepted Dave Maas's invitation to prepare a paper for this symposium, I've had a difficult time choosing what to write about. My mind has been figuratively spinning out of control with various thoughts and approaches. I suppose this is a logical consequence of applying a general semantics orientation in my life — the more insights I grasp, the more I see there is to grasp. (Sort of like pulling weeds in the spring — for every one you pull, two pop up.)

I've had many ideas regarding what I could present here. I gave some thought to expanding on my article which was just published in ETC. about the general semantics summer seminar. And I've developed some thoughts about relating Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay *Self-Reliance* to general semantics. And I saw some interesting possibilities in studying how the characters in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* applied general semantics principles. But on reflection, there was a general theme which seemed to recur in all my thoughts: What is this general semantics really all about? Well, I'm going to tell you my answer. And my answer is, what general semantics is all about is, it's about 'ME'! And I've spent a long time studying 'ME' — at least twenty years.

Twenty years ago this month, I was a junior at the Air Force Academy, sitting in my dorm room, facing a creative writing assignment. Specifically, the assignment was to write a one-act play. For some reason, I chose to write what I termed a 'morality' play. The central character was named YOU, and throughout the play YOU struggled to find himself (or in his terms, "the real ME") after encountering pressures to conform to The Group and temptations to yield to the Ways Of The World. The title of the play was *The Unveiling Of Ourselves*. (1)

And now, twenty years later, I, the erstwhile author, have assumed the role of the erstwhile character in carrying on the search for "the real ME". To a significant degree, the study and application of general semantics has enabled me to better evaluate and analyze ME. In fact, I've developed a model of how ME works, which I call "My ME Model". So I'd like to seize this opportunity to present to you "My ME Model" and to discuss how it applies within the context of life and general semantics.

The Exercise

Before I present "My ME Model", here's a short exercise. Nine words are listed in the box below. Each denotes what I'll call a 'feeling'. Following are several questions which refer to the group of words in the box. Read over the words, then consider the questions.

anxiety	disappointment	embarrassment
envy	guilt	regret
rejection	shame	stress

1. What would your life be like if you spent most of the time feeling these feelings?
2. What would your life be like if you spent practically no time feeling these feelings?
3. Would you say that you feel these feelings more now or when you were first born?
4. Have you learned how to feel more of these feelings? How did you learn? Who taught you?
5. Who or what determines the circumstances and the degree to which you feel these feelings?
6. What is it that happens to 'cause' these feelings?

The Context

What was the purpose of the exercise? Well, as I reminisced about what's happened to me since those undergraduate days at

the foot of the Rocky Mountains, I had several thoughts such as "Boy, I hope I never have to experience those feelings again." The nine words in the exercise represent some of those feelings which I'd like to avoid or minimize in the future, because I've already met my minimum lifetime requirements of regret, rejection, guilt, etc. Been there, done that.

Having made this commitment to minimize those feelings, how do I start to follow through and make good on it? The first step, for me, was to consider a series of questions such as those in this exercise. And for me, when I thought about those questions, what occurred to me were not answers, but more nagging questions: Did I really 'learn' how to feel rejected? Was I 'taught' how to feel anxious and guilt-ridden? Was I not always this way? Can I 'unlearn' what I've 'learned'? Does this kind of stuff have to be a part of who I am, the real ME?

Within the context of a general semantics orientation, these questions led me to develop "My ME Model" in order to more appropriately analyze and evaluate ME.

The Model

I often find it beneficial to develop a model or diagram when attempting to grasp new or difficult relationships. To me, it's more meaningful to see graphically how something works or is structured, rather than to just read a description of it. And, for me, there has been no more difficult relationship to grasp than the relationship I have with ME.

The field of general semantics certainly does not lack for diagrams or models. Alfred Korzybski's Structural Differential was surely the first and most influential. Then S.I. Hayakawa's abstraction ladder and J. Samuel Bois's semantic transactor — each had similarities to Korzybski's, but each also had unique aspects to suit the peculiar purposes of the modeler. For my purposes, for what I wanted to communicate about the general semantics orientation, none of these models was quite suitable. So I developed my own, which certainly bears some resemblance to, and acknowledges, those of my 'time-binding' predecessors.

The purpose of "My ME Model" is to graphically portray the process which produces ME. I've studied and tested this model as it pertains to my own self, and I believe it accurately applies to me. Feel free to check it out for yourself, to see if it applies to your own ME.

In its most simplified version, the model (Figure 1) can be expressed as a 4-step process:

1. Something is going on
2. I experience what's going on
3. I evaluate my experience of what's going on
4. From my evaluation of my experience of what's going on, I respond to and give meaning to what is going on.

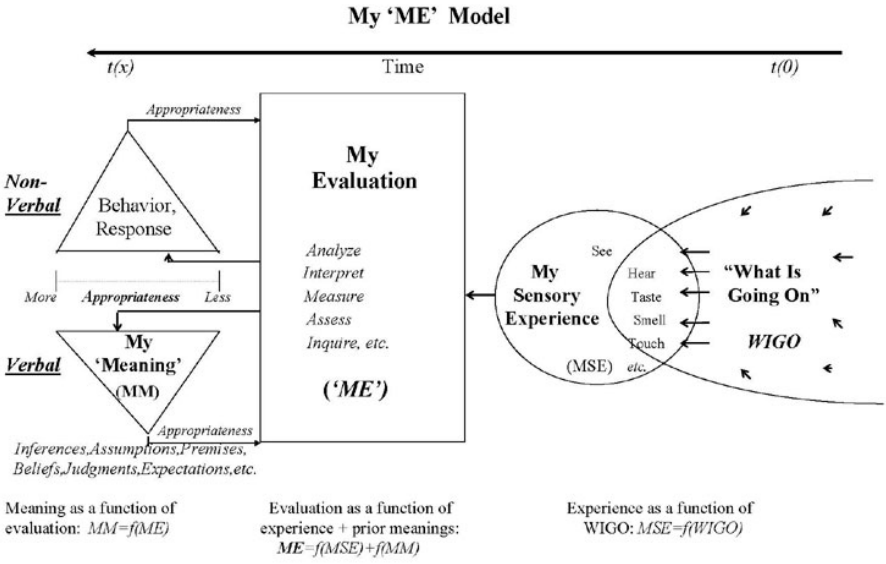


Figure 1

Now this seems pretty straightforward. But there are a few considerations or nuances which might not be apparent without some additional comments.

1. "What Is Going On" (or in general semantics lingo, per J.S. Bois, 'WIGO') could be described as the continually-changing environment in which I find myself. It's worth a reminder that

everything is changing all the time. I may not be able to detect the changes with my limited senses, but I trust the theories of quantum mechanics, and recognize that nothing remains the same.

2. None of my sensing capabilities is capable of sensing all that's going on. Whatever it is I see, hear, etc., I'm not seeing or hearing all that's there to be seen or heard.

3. None of my senses is perfect. This should appear obvious given that I wear glasses. But it's worthwhile to recognize that whatever it is that I sense, has been, to some extent, distorted by the limitations and imperfections of my sensing organs and nervous system.

4. I can only detect "What Is Going On" after it's gone on.

5. Given the preceding factors, I need to be continually aware that what I've labeled as "My Sensory Experience" is, in every instance, to some degree, a necessarily distorted and unique experience within an ever-changing WIGO. If I think about how I function as a human being, it seems to me that there is not a lot I can do to change or improve my sensing organs. I can wear glasses to correct some visual defects, or perhaps enlist the aid of a hearing device if that becomes necessary. But there isn't much I can do to actually improve the ability of my eyes or ears or taste buds to physically detect what's out there in the WIGO. So I'm more or less forced to view my sensing abilities as an imperfect given, which I can't do a whole lot to affect.

6. Within the process I've labeled as "My Evaluation", however, there is a myriad of possibilities for individual determination. Activities such as analyzing, interpreting, measuring, assessing, inquiring, and many others are available to me in my evaluation of an experience.

7. The output of “My Evaluation” is divided into two categories of evaluations. Evaluations resulting in non-verbal, physiological reactions or responses (i.e., ‘behavior’) are indicated by the output path leading to the top triangle. Evaluations resulting in verbal responses are indicated in the triangle below, and are labeled as “My Meaning”. These verbal evaluations could be classified by words such as “inferences, assumptions, premises, beliefs, judgments, expectations,” etc. Note the scale labeled “Appropriateness.” My evaluations, and my subsequent behavior and abstracted meanings, can be subjected to a measure of appropriateness. In this context, “appropriateness” refers to a measure of my evaluation/meaning compared to what I actually experienced.

That further explains the four sequential steps to the process model. But there is another aspect to the model which must not be overlooked. This could be called ‘feedback’ and is the aspect which makes the model process a process. Notice that there are output lines leading out of both triangles. The process, as indicated by the model, doesn’t end with the triangles. Some degree of the behavior and meaning resulting from the evaluation is abstracted and fed back into the evaluation process. Some degree of the output is transformed into a subsequent input.

The “My Evaluation” process block thus becomes a bit more complicated. This process must now integrate the sensory experience of “What Is Going On” with the abstracted feedback of what has already gone on and been evaluated and meant something before. And here, I suspect, is the stage of the process in which I’m the most susceptible. When I attempt to integrate the feedback of a previous less than appropriate evaluation/meaning with an “at-the-moment” experience, my evaluation of that experience will likely also be, to some degree, less than appropriate.

To summarize the process model now in slightly different and more complete terms:

1. "What Is Going On" (WIGO) consists of continually-changing processes, most of which are not detectable by my sensory abilities, except in highly abstracted forms.

2. What I can experience by my sensory organs (My Sensory Experience) is a function of "What Is Going On", which could be expressed as **MSE=f(WIGO)**

3. My Evaluation is a function of my sensory experience, which could be expressed as **ME=f(MSE)**.

4. My Meaning is then a function of my evaluation, which could be expressed as **MM=f(ME)**.

5. This abstracted meaning is then fed back to be integrated in subsequent evaluations.

So, after twenty years, with the application of general semantics I have finally come to the point where I can claim victory in my search to mathematically derive "the real ME":

ME can be expressed as a continually-changing function
that integrates my experiences of
what is going on at the moment with my past meanings, or
ME=f(MSE)+f(MM)

The Analysis and Application

With this model of ME now available, I can use it to analyze what's gone on in the past, or apply it to what's going on in the present.

For example, let's go back to one of those feelings — 'rejection'. Before I was aware of how ME worked, I would've thought that I had experienced the feeling of being 'rejected'. In other words, I thought that 'rejection' was something out there going on in WIGO. Now, having access to the model, it's clear to me that the feeling of 'rejection' is more appropriately considered as

the verbal result of my evaluation — not something which I physically experienced with one of my sensory organs.

Here's a real-life illustration. About two years ago, when I was really into being 'rejected', I was driving into Dallas about once a week to attend an evening seminar. At one particularly congested intersection, there was always one of these rose-seller guys. He'd stand on the side-walk or median while the light was green, then walk up and down beside the cars while the light was red, selling his roses. I observed this same guy for several weeks. He always had his Walkman plugged in, he always seemed to be grooving to the music, he always had a smile on his face, and he always seemed to be enjoying life. And yet, I never actually saw anyone buy a rose from him.

One evening, I approached the intersection after a particularly stressful day with something of a "stay away from me, world"-attitude. Sure enough, I didn't make the light, so I sat there stewing in the summer heat and vigorously shook my head when he offered his roses — he was just smiling and jamming and waving his roses and basking in the late evening's warmth. Needing to feel a bit superior, I disgustedly muttered to myself, "That guy has got to be the biggest idiot on earth! He's out here day after day with that stupid grin on his face, and he's so stupid he's not even aware that he's getting rejected about a hundred times a minute!"

About one nanosecond later, as I sunk down in my seat, I humbly realized that perhaps the rose seller and I had different ideas about what 'rejection' meant. What I had previously learned about 'rejection', and what I was ready to rashly project into this experience as 'rejection', was based on my prior experiences, evaluations and meanings of what 'rejection' was. Therefore, when I saw the rose seller in that moment's WIGO, I integrated what I experienced at the moment with what I had learned in the past about 'rejection', and developed an evaluation at that moment which was completely consistent with what I had previously learned. I evaluated the rose-seller as being 'rejected'. But there was a conflict. My initial reaction was to see 'rejection', but my second reaction, a nanosecond later, was to question my first

reaction. My second reaction acknowledged that the feedback or what I had learned did not seem to appropriately apply to this experience. To resolve the conflict, I had to re-look at what I had previously assumed 'rejection' was, and change my assumption to conform to what I was actually experiencing at that moment. In other words, I had to unlearn what I had learned before about 'rejection'.

Here's another example. I remember watching a "60 Minutes" segment several years ago about a popular Soviet beach resort on the Black Sea. There was picture after picture of Soviet (now Russian, but what's in a name?) citizenry, none of whom was particularly attractive, all of whom were apparently approaching obesity, and each of whom was wearing unbelievably tight and skimpy swimwear. I remember thinking, "Man, that's disgusting! They don't have any shame at all!" Now, however, applying the model process, I have to ask myself, "Where is the disgusting?" Is 'it' out there in WIGO, or is it my evaluation based on perhaps inappropriate beliefs or judgments about what people should look like at the beach, and what they should wear?

Here's what I've learned generally about my evaluations through applying this model:

1) Too often, I confuse my evaluation of an experience of "what goes on" with the actual experience. When I say, "Man, that's disgusting!", I'm not describing what I've seen. I'm stating an evaluation, or opinion, or belief, about what I've seen. I would be looking for a long time if I was tasked to search for something out there in WIGO which is, literally, "disgusting". ("Your mission, should you decide to accept it, is to track down and bring in 'Disgusting'. This tape will self-destruct in ten seconds. Good luck, Steve.") Now, I clearly 'know' this distinction between the evaluation and the experience, but sometimes I have difficulty applying the knowledge which I know I 'know'.

2) The feedback loops could also represent 'learning'. In this context, learning refers to the prior meanings, assumptions, beliefs, etc, which I bring to my current experience. Since the

model indicates that there is a degree of appropriateness to each of these evaluational outputs, it follows that there is a similar degree of appropriateness to what I have learned, and what I've been taught. As the story of the rejected rose-seller illustrates, there is probably a lot of stuff which I've learned or been taught which I need to conscientiously question and then perhaps unlearn.

There is a short but very powerful song from the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical South Pacific which I think applies in this context. In the story, Lt. Joe Cable, an officer in the US Navy, is stationed on a remote island in the South Pacific during World War II. He meets and falls in love with Liat, a young native girl. In his evaluation of his feelings for Liat, he has to confront the differences in their cultures and beliefs. He sings the song, "You've Got To Be Carefully Taught":(2)

> You've got to be taught, to hate and fear,
> You've got to be taught, from year to year,
> It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear,
> You've got to be carefully taught.
>
> You've got to be taught to be afraid
> Of people who's eyes are oddly made
> And people who's skin is a different shade.
> You've got to be carefully taught.
>
> You've got to be taught, before it's too late,
> Before you are six or seven or eight
> To hate all the people your relatives hate
> You've got to be carefully taught.

3) I now recognize that I don't apply everything that I know, plus I suspect that much of what I 'know' may not actually be so. I also have to consider the fact that everything I experience has, to some degree, been distorted by my unique, imperfect and incomplete sensory organs. Therefore, I think it's prudent on my part to be a bit tentative

and hesitant in assessing what I perceive as going on, rather than immediately assuming that what I 'see' and infer actually 'is'. So in my talking or thinking about what I've experienced and evaluated, I need to qualify my impressions of what happened as uniquely my impressions of what occurred 'to me'.

4) It seems, to me, that the idea of "living in the moment" is a worthy objective. For me to "live in the moment" and be totally open to and aware of what I'm experiencing, I have to exercise control over the feedback of my prior meanings. I have to be careful not to allow inappropriate prior meanings to unnecessarily distort or dilute my evaluation of what I'm experiencing at the moment. Another way of expressing this idea is to say that I need to limit the 'excess baggage' which I'm tempted to carry around — sort of like the airlines' limit of two carry-on bags.

   How do I do this, how do I exercise the control required to not carry around 'excess baggage'? It certainly is not easy, especially during circumstances in which I'm tempted to make emotional, knee-jerk evaluations. The key, to me, is to not think in terms of putting the 'baggage' out of my mind. Instead, the key, for me, is to realize that the 'baggage' exists only in my mind — it's not 'out there' in what's going on at the moment. Therefore I can exercise some degree of deliberate control in determining how much of the past I choose to integrate with what's going on at the moment.

5) What I perceive as going on is a unique experience which I'm experiencing for the first time, every time. Forrest Gump not withstanding, I'd make the case that life's experiences are like snowflakes — every one is different, and one is never repeated.

Speaking of Forrest Gump. Even if you haven't seen the movie, you probably have some idea of the type of character Forrest is. Some reviewers have used words like 'slow', 'dim-witted', 'dumb', 'simpleton' to describe Forrest Gump. But think for a minute about his evaluation processes. He was indeed less capable in his learning abilities — he clearly did not learn everything his peers learned. But he did fully experience what was going on around him at the moment. In his evaluations, he didn't dilute his at the moment experiences with a lot of inappropriate 'baggage', because he wasn't carrying the 'baggage'!. What he had been unable to learn, or didn't learn, was the 'excess baggage' which everyone else learned and carried around in their minds for years. In my opinion, Forrest Gump exemplified someone who maximizes applying the knowledge he has, and minimizes applying what he 'knows' that isn't actually so. As a result, he didn't feel the same degree of shame, or embarrassment, or expectations, or those feelings which others did. He was, in a real sense, more human and more sane.

What Next?

I'd like to conclude with some thoughts for follow-on contemplation.

Some of you may be familiar with the work of psychologist Abraham Maslow and his hierarchy of needs. Maslow theorized that humans were motivated to satisfy different categories (or levels) of needs, according to a determined order. This hierarchy has been depicted as a pyramid, with the lowest, most basic level of needs on the bottom, and successive levels of needs depicted above. (3)

According to Maslow, humans are first motivated by physiological needs, such as food, water, air, etc. Only after these needs are satisfied are we motivated to seek the safety and security of shelter and protection against the environment. With these needs met, we can seek the human needs of love and belongingness, then self-esteem, and then ultimately what Maslow terms "self-actualization". In his words, a person who is self-actualizing is one who "makes full use and exploitation of his talents, capacities and potentialities….who has developed or is developing to the full stature of which they are capable."4 He also refers to this as "full-humanness". (5)

Maslow devoted himself to the study of these people whom he classified as "self-actualized". I'd like to list a few of his findings regarding their observed behavior patterns and personality characteristics:

- They had "a more efficient perception of reality and more comfortable relations with it….they live more in the real

world of nature than in the man-made mass of concepts, abstractions, expectations, beliefs and stereotypes that most people confuse with the world...they are therefore far more apt to perceive what is there rather than their own wishes, hopes, fears, anxieties, their own theories and beliefs or those of their cultural group." (6)

- They "accepted themselves as they found themselves at the moment." (7)
- "They did not allow theories, fads, names, the unverified opinions of other people — all higher order abstractions — to distort what they could taste, smell, feel." (8)
- Their "behavior is marked by simplicity and naturalness." (9)
- "Their ease of penetration to reality, their closer approach to an animal-like or child-like acceptance and spontaneity imply a superior awareness of their own impulses, desires, opinions and subjective reactions in general." (10)
- They "have the wonderful capacity to appreciate again and again, freshly and naively, the basic goods of life, with awe, pleasure, wonder and even ecstasy, however stale these experiences may have become to others....this fresh appreciation of the most common moment-to-moment business of living..." (11)
- They "tend to be good and lusty animals, hearty in their appetites and enjoying themselves mightily without regret or shame or apology." (12)
- "They waste less of their time and energy protecting themselves against themselves." (13)

Now, it seems to me that there is some connection here. The behavior and attitudes of these people observed by Maslow to have manifested "full humanness" must seemingly have resulted from more appropriate evaluations, both past and present, than the evaluations of other people who were observed to have not achieved "full humanness". Could a greater consciousness or awareness of how I generate evaluations/meanings lead to a more fully human life?

As a final exercise, Figure 2 depicts a re-oriented Maslow's hierarchy of needs alongside "My ME Model" Could this possibly represent how applying a general semantics orientation constitutes a step towards more sane evaluations, or 'self-actualization', or 'full humanness'? It seems, to 'ME', that's what general semantics is all about.

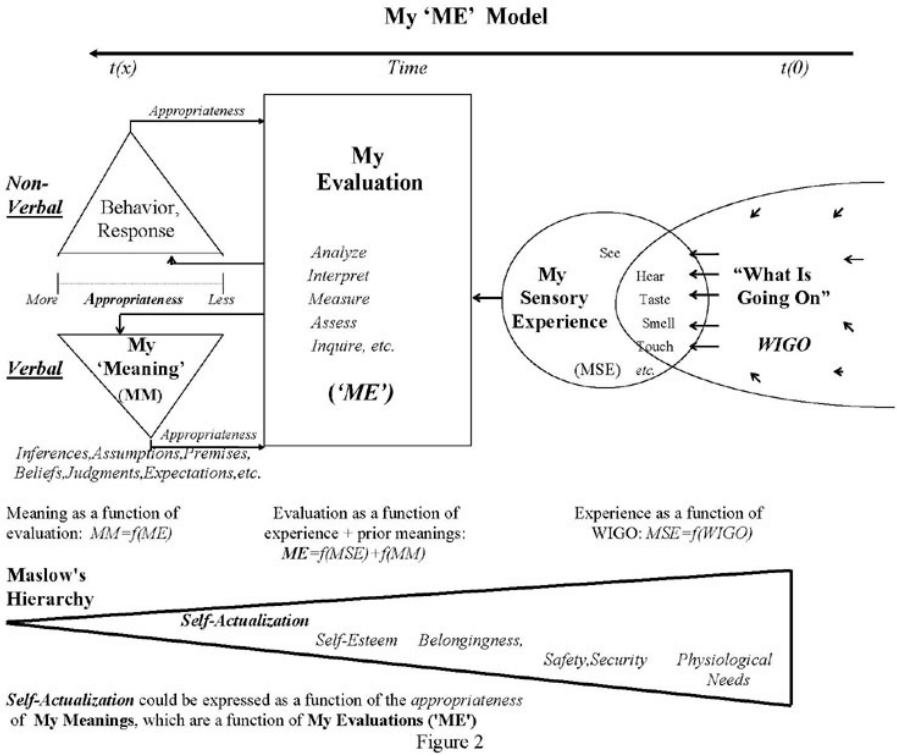


Figure 2

I know I cannot paint a flower. I know I cannot paint the sun on the desert on a bright summer morning, but maybe in terms of paint color I can convey my experience of the flower or the experience that makes the flower of significance to me at that particular time.

Georgia O'Keeffe (14)

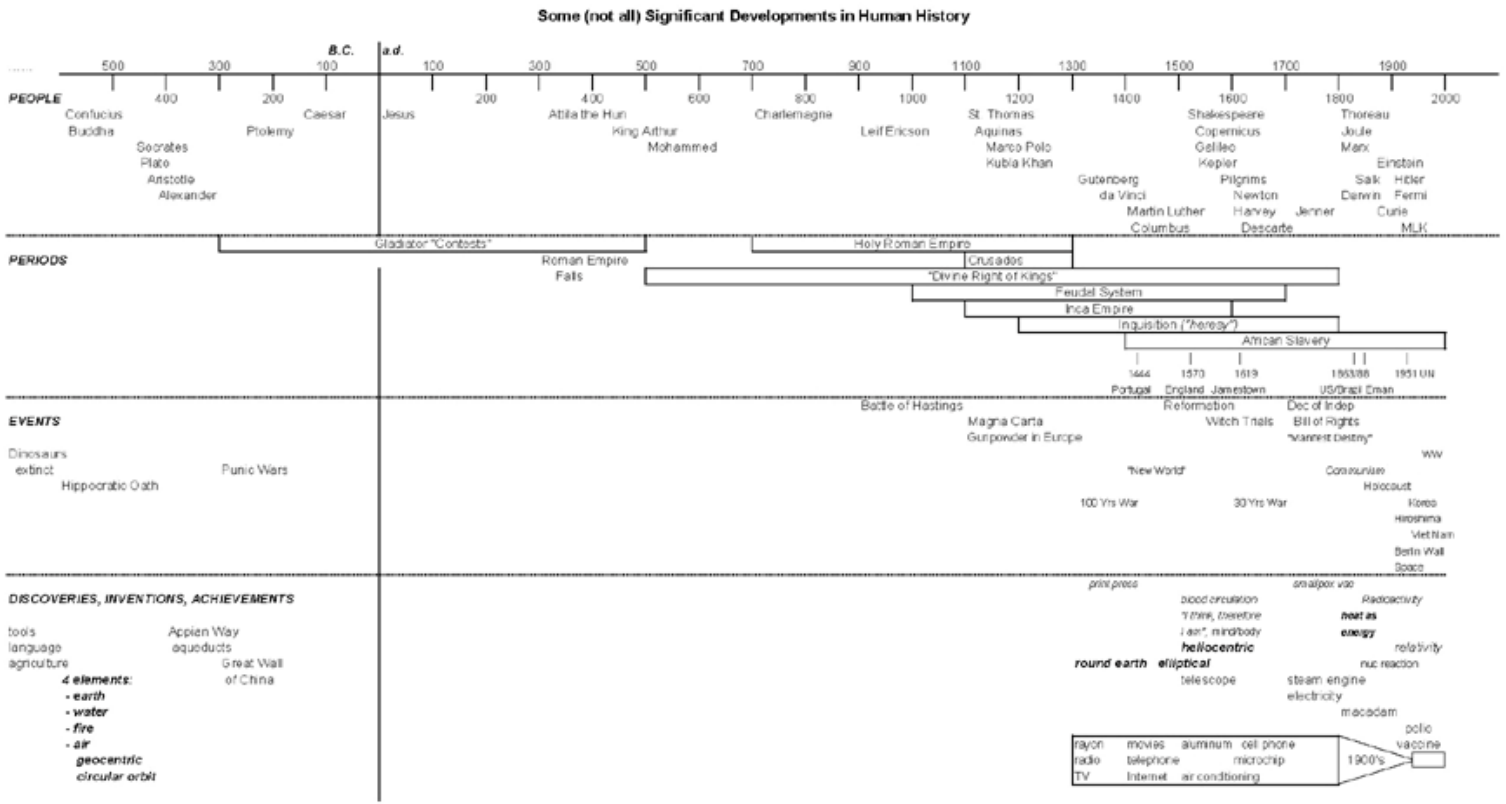
Report from a Weekend Seminar

We introduced ourselves. Then we discussed the spiral nature of learning, vs. the traditional "building block" analogy, and how it applies to the way we've structured the curriculum to talk about:

- Time-binding
- Scientific Approach
- Abstracting and Evaluating (or Behavior Awareness)
- Verbal Awareness
- Non-Verbal Awareness

We talked about *time-binding* as formulated by Alfred Korzybski. Korzybski coined the term *time-binding* as the distinction which operationally defined the human class of life, as differentiated from the animal class. This critical distinction can be summarized as this: Only humans have the ability to pass on knowledge, intelligence, learning, etc., such that succeeding generations can build on the labors of prior generations. A son can pick up from where the father left off. The 'tool' which enables this time-binding is language, and our uniquely-human ability to manipulate symbols. We also discussed the implications of time-binding as a standard of ethics. We each thanked someone who has contributed to our own individual development.

We constructed a timeline of history since 500 B.C., and annotated some of the significant people, events, periods, and discoveries/inventions which reflect time-binding. We interpreted from the timeline that human 'progress' has not been linear.


Some (not all) Significant Developments in Human History
B.C.
a.d.
500 300 100 100 300 500 700 900 1100 1300 1500 1700 1900
PEOPLE
400 200 200 400 600 800 1000 1200 1400 1600 1800 2000
Confucius
Buddha
Socrates
Plato
Aristotle
Alexander
Ptolemy
Caesar
Jesus
Attila the Hun
King Arthur
Mohammed
Charlemagne
Leif Ericson
St. Thomas
Aquinas
Marco Polo
Kubla Khan
Gutenberg
da Vinci
Martin Luther
Columbus
Shakespeare
Copernicus
Galileo
Kepler
Pilgrims
Newton
Harvey
Descarte
Thoreau
Joule
Marx
Einstein
Salk
Hitler
Darwin
Fermi
Jenner
Curie
MLK
PERIODS
Gladiator "Contests"
Roman Empire Falls
Holy Roman Empire
Crusades
"Divine Right of Kings"
Feudal System
Inca Empire
Inquisition ("heresy")
African Slavery
1444 Portugal
1570 England
1619 Jamestown
1863/88 US/Brazil Eman
1951 UN
EVENTS
Dinosaurs extinct
Hippocratic Oath
Punic Wars
Battle of Hastings
Magna Carta
Gunpowder in Europe
Reformation
Witch Trials
Dec of Indep
Bill of Rights
"Manifest Destiny"
"New World"
100 Yrs War
30 Yrs War
WW
Communism
Holocaust
Korea
Hiroshima
Viet Nam
Berlin Wall
Space
DISCOVERIES, INVENTIONS, ACHIEVEMENTS
tools
language
agriculture
4 elements:
- earth
- water
- fire
- air
geocentric
circular orbit
Appian Way
aqueducts
Great Wall of China
print press
blood circulation
"I think, therefore I am", mind/body
heliocentric
round earth
elliptical
telescope
smallpox vac
Radioactivity
heat as energy
relativity
nuc reaction
steam engine
electricity
macadam
polio vaccine
rayon
radio
TV
movies
telephone
Internet
aluminum
air conditioning
cell phone
microchip
1900's

People, Periods, Events and Discoveries for the Timeline

People	Periods	Events	Discoveries
Alexander	African Slave Trade	100 Years War	aquaducts
Aristotle	Communism	Declaration of Independence	blood circulation
Attila the Hun	Crusades	Appian Way	printing press
Buddha	Divine Right of Kings	French Revolution	radioactivity
Caesar	Feudal system	gunpowder in Europe	Geocentric earth orbit
Charlemagne	Gladiators	Hippocratic oath	Heliocentric earth orbit
Columbus	Holocaust	Korea	smallpox vaccine
Confucius	Holy Roman Empire	Magna Carta	"New World"
Copernicus	Reformation	Punic Wars	nuclear reaction
Curie	Roman Empire Falls	WW I	heat as element
Darwin	Spanish Inquisition	WW II	heat as energy
Descartes	Witch trials	Great Wall of China	tools
Einstein	Inca Empire	Battle of Hastings	language
Fermi		Irish Repub Army	agriculture
Galileo		Viet Nam	telescope
Gutenberg		30 Years War	electricity
Harvey Hitler		"Manifest Destiny"	television
Jenner		end of dinosaurs	cellular phone
Jesus		Bill of Rights	telephone
Joule		Berlin Wall United Nations	macadam roads
Kepler		Kennedy/Nixon election	microchip
King Arthur		Space flight/moon walk	rayon
Kubla Khan		Hiroshima, Nagasaki	polio vaccine
Leif Ericson		MLK "I Have A Dream"	Internet
Leonardo da Vinci		"Walden"	aluminum
Marco Polo			pre-fab construction
Martin Luther			air conditioning
Marx			quantum mechanics
Muhammad			hydraulic brakes
Newton			personal computer
Plato			relativity
Ptolemy			information systems
Shakespeare			movies
Socrates			steam engine
St. Thomas Aquinas			
Pilgrims			
Thoreau			
Salk			

In other words, we have not progressed at a constant rate over the past 2,500 years. Instead, our 'progress' seems to reflect more of an exponential growth curve, which appears to coincide with the widespread application of a more scientific approach beginning around the 17th century.

However, we acknowledged the "two-edged sword" aspect of language; while it has facilitated time-binding, it has also been used and misused to thwart both personal and social advancement.

We talked about what constitutes a "scientific approach," an investigative process in which one:

- confronts some type of question, curiosity, or problem;
- collects data, asks questions, determines facts about the question or problem;
- forms some kind of hypothesis, makes some assumptions, generates some opinions about what the data indicate, etc.;
- develops a test to check out the assumptions, hypothesis, etc.;
- based upon the results of the test, modifies the initial assumptions, hypothesis, beliefs, opinions, etc., while continuing to collect data, refine assumptions, develop new tests, revise theories, etc.

We discussed eight primary differences between a "Pre-Scientific Orientation" and a "Scientific Orientation," as articulated by Wendell Johnson in his book, *People In Quandaries*.

We presented a framework involving four levels of increasing consciousness or awareness:

1) Abstracting - our normal, automatic, unthinking, selecting/rejecting/constructing of those 'things' which we are aware of and we're concerned with at any point in time; our going-about-our-daily-living mode of "abstracting" (i.e., our 'doing', without our being consciously aware of what we're 'doing').

2) Conscious Abstracting - the mode in which we are consciously aware of what we are doing as we do it (i.e., "I'm driving too fast in this rain.")

3) Consciousness of Abstracting - the level of awareness in which we acknowledge that we are consciously abstracting, and that there is more going on than what we're consciously abstracting (i.e., "I'm aware that I'm driving too fast in this rain. And I know there is more I need to be conscious of besides speed.")

4) Executive consciousness - the 'meta'-level consciousness which regulates, monitors, supervises our awarenesses, e.g., "parenting yourself..

Becoming aware of these different levels of awareness helps us improve our lives and relationships, in that:

a. If you aren't aware of what you want to change, you can't change it;
b. If you want things in your life to change, you have to change the way you think about things;
c. To do this, you have to be aware of *how* you are 'thinking' about things

Milton Dawes introduced the notion of "Culturally-Expected Ways of Thinking" (CEWT, pronounced "cute"). From the moment we're born, we are bombarded with words, and we are surrounded by particular cultural structures, books, institutions, television, advertisements, etc. These Instances of CONditioning (or "ICONs") result in our being conditioned, to various degrees, to 'think' in particular ways. These CEWT ways of thinking - when not modulated by our consciousness of abstracting - oftentimes produce undesirable results in our lives. We can draw parallels between our CEWT thinking and the "Pre-Scientific Orientation" thinking.

By contrast, the principles or formulations of general semantics provide us with ways to create more accurate and up-to-date 'maps' of the 'territories' we encounter in our daily living. This way

of thinking seems to more closely resemble the attributes of the "Scientific Orientation" thinking. We discussed some of these formulations, and how they apply in 'real life' based on some of our shared personal experiences.

He discussed how our ability to improve ourselves (Self-Improvement) can be expressed as a function of our ability to correct ourselves (Self-Correction), which can be expressed as a function of our awareness of ourselves (Self-Awareness).

Self-Awareness --> Self-Correction --> Self-Improvement

We participated in some outdoor awareness exercises to practice becoming aware of our conscious abstracting, and of our consciousness of abstracting.

We experienced demonstrations with the trapezoidal window and the Benham disc, and recognized that even on non-verbal levels we misevaluate. Our senses often mislead us if we simply believe that what we see is what is there, and what we see is ALL that's there. We also recognized how our personal interactions with "what's going on" differ from everyone else's personal interactions.

We talked about the differences between inferences and 'facts', and discussed factors related to the importance of not overlooking inferences and not acting upon them as if they were 'facts'.

We examined some simple sentences to appreciate that even grammatically-correct sentences may structurally misrepresent what we know about the world around us. Our talking may lead us to confuse what's going on "out there" with what's going on "in here"; for example, "the grass is green" ascribes a quality of "green-ness" to the grass, when in fact the "green-ness" is a function of reflected light off the grass, processed by the observer's unique nervous system.

We reviewed the Structural Differential as a map to help us make distinctions in our evaluations. We discussed why it's important to make the differentiations that:

- what goes on around us is NOT our sensory experience of what goes on;
- what we describe is NOT the same as our sensory experience;
- what we infer or conclude or believe about what we describe is NOT what we described, or experienced, or what happened, etc.

We did an exercise in which we learned how we each "measure" differently, based on our prior experiences, context, available tools, etc. "To measure" in this context can be broadly defined to include other activities such as to: calculate, judge, compare to, criticize, map, define, etc.

And we learned that as we take our own individual 'measures', we do so against unique individual 'standards'. These 'standards' could be described as our beliefs, values, paradigms, goals, plans, predispositions, religious principles, etc.

He taught a lesson about calculus, illustrating how we can apply the principles of the calculus to make finer and finer discriminations in our evaluations. We discussed the differences between "micro-mapping" and "gross-mapping".

We had a fun-learning-time-binding time. We did lots of experiments-exercises to help us move from words to experience.

And, of course ... we did more than can be said.

Etc.

About “Mindfulness” and GS

As the scholar selected to give the 46th Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture, Ellen J. Langer, Harvard Professor of Psychology and author, espouses a notion she refers to as *mindfulness*. Her findings, derived from thirty years of research and study with various colleagues, parallel much of what Korzybski proposed almost 70 years ago as the benefits of what he termed a general semantics, or *extensional*, orientation.

In her 1997 book, *The Power of Mindful Learning*, Ms. Langer summarizes the distinctions she makes between *mindful* and *mindless*:

> A mindful approach to any activity has three characteristics: the continuous creation of new categories; openness to new information; and an implicit awareness of more than one perspective. Mindlessness, in contrast, is characterized by an entrapment in old categories; by automatic behavior that precludes attending to new signals; and by action that operates from a single perspective. (1)

Drawing primarily on research and anecdotes contained in *The Power of Mindful Learning* and her 1989 book, *Mindfulness*, Ms. Langer engaged the audience in a lively, sometimes passionate, discussion regarding her findings. Many of her stories came from research conducted with the elderly in nursing homes. A key conclusion derived from these studies concerns the benefits of allowing — if not encouraging — aging individuals to make decisions and choices for themselves. As her data showed, those individuals challenged to make even seemingly-trivial decisions for themselves exhibited much more mindful behavior, as reflected by testing and — perhaps not coincidentally — longer lives.

In my reading of and listening to Ms. Langer, I noted the following similarities with general semantics formulations:

- She emphasized the importance of a scientific approach, or method, to how we think and act. We need to mindfully revise our theories and beliefs to fit the facts instead of mindlessly looking to find data to validate beliefs.
- She began her interaction with the audience aided by overhead transparencies to illustrate how projection influences our perceptions. She showed several dual images familiar to students of general semantics, such as the "old woman or young woman or old man".
- She emphasized the importance of creating new categories, new labels, new ways of categorizing, reminiscent of Korzybski's admonition to avoid "hardening of the categories".
- She noted how much of our behaviors and attitudes come from traditions, with no more "mindful" consideration than "that's the way we've always done it." She related an anecdote I first heard from a participant at the 1994 IGS seminar-workshop, who perhaps had read Langer's book. A young woman used a third-generation recipe for cooking a pot roast, which including slicing off both ends of the roast. When someone asked the woman why she sliced off the ends, she replied, "I don't know. That's how my mother did it." Her mother was then asked the same question, to which she responded, "I don't know. That's how my mother did it." The young woman's grandmother was tracked down and asked why her family recipe for pot roast included slicing off both ends. The grandmother replied, "Because my pan was too short to hold the roast. So I cut off both ends to make it fit."
- She spoke about the importance of context, the individuality of experience, and the ever-changing process nature of the universe.

She made the somewhat provocative claim that people should strive for mindfulness at all times. While admitting the unlikely achievement of this, she qualified her position somewhat by allowing that in every situation we encounter, we should either manifest mindfulness, or maintain the potential for mindful behavior.

I definitely recommend these two books, especially to anyone interested in the application, and benefits, of general semantics.

That said, however, I temper my otherwise enthusiastic review of Ms. Langer's work with two critical observations. First, although she made an excellent presentation of her research, findings and implications regarding the benefits of mindfulness, I didn't get a sense that she offers any explicit prescriptions for what one needs to do to achieve a mindful orientation. I failed to find a parallel, for example, to Korzybski's recommended techniques to aid the individual in applying useful techniques toward a more mindful orientation.

He called these techniques *extensional devices*, summarized here as:

- ***indexing****:* Muslim$_{(1)}$ is not Muslim$_{(2)}$; Feminist$_{(1)}$ is not Feminist$_{(2)}$;. Remember to look for the differences even among a group or category that presume similarities.
- ***dating****:* Steve$_{(2008)}$ is not Steve$_{(1968)}$; Steve's-views-on-abortion$_{(2008)}$ are not Steve's-views-on-abortion$_{(1988)}$. Remember that each person and each 'thing' we experience changes over time, even though the changes may not be apparent to us.
- ***quotes****:* 'truth' ... 'reality' ... 'mind' ... 'elite' ... Use quotes around terms as a caution to indicate you're aware that there is an opportunity for misunderstanding if the term is particularly subject to interpretation, or if you're being sarcastic, ironic, or facetious. Context must be considered, but it's especially important in determining how these types of expression should be evaluated.
- ***hyphen****:* mind-body, thinking-feeling. Use to join terms that we can separate in language, but can't actually sepa-

rate in the 'real' world. Remember that we can talk in terms that don't accurately reflect the world 'out there.'

- ***etc.***: Remember that our knowledge and awareness of anything is limited. We can't sense or experience or talk about all of something, so we should maintain an awareness that "more could be said." (2)

Secondly, Ms. Langer seemed to dismiss the work of neuroscientists as of a different domain, with questionable relevance to that of psychology — she sounded content to let them (neuroscientists) do their thing, while she does hers. This struck me, from a GS perspective, as a bit elementalistic in terms of separating the 'cognitive' from the physiological.

However, my overall impression is that Ms. Langer's work provides an important contribution to individuals seeking to achieve a more mindful, aware, and productive general orientation in their daily living. I recommend both *Mindfulness* and *The Power of Mindful Learning*.

Happiness is not something that happens ... It does not depend on outside events, but, rather, on how we interpret them ... How we feel about ourselves, the joy we get from living, ultimately depend directly on how the mind filters and interprets everyday experiences.
Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi(3)

If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your estimation of it; and this you have the power to revoke at any moment.
Marcus Aurelius(4)

The Girl and the Match

Alfred Korzybski, author of *Science and Sanity*, was asked to speak at a prestigious school for girls (I assume the Barstow school in Kansas City) in the mid-1930's. He had been informed beforehand that there was one particular girl who posed a problem at the school. The girl was quite talented and intelligent, but something of a disciplinary problem and not really liked by the other girls. In short, she acted "full of herself."

Korzybski arranged for the girl to be seated on the stage with him at a small table after he was introduced. She, of course, sat beaming with pride as she shared the stage with the famous Count Korzybski! He began his talk, seated behind the table due to a leg injury suffered during World War I.

As he often did, during his talk he pulled from his pocket a pack of cigarettes, a holder, and a small box of matches. He placed them on the table in front of him. After a few minutes, he made something of a show of taking a cigarette from the pack and placing it in the holder. The girl, eagerly watching him, seated within reach of the matches, waited expectantly for Korzybski to finish his preparations so she light his cigarette. Sure enough, as soon as he gave her the slightest nod, she grabbed the box of matches, pushed the middle open and reached inside to take a match.

To her surprise, however, the box was empty. Korzybski continued talking, then turned to look at the bemused girl and the empty matchbox. The entire room focused attention on the girl. She opened the box completely, turned it upside down to show it was empty, and said rather haughtily, "Who would carry around an empty matchbox?"

Korzybski replied dismissively, "My dear, the world is a far bigger place than you've ever imagined."

He set the cigarette and holder back down on the table and proceeded with his talk.

A few minutes later he reached into his pocket, pulled out another box of matches and placed them on the table within reach of the girl. Again, she watched intently for him to pick up the cigarette and allow her to light it. This time, instead of immediately opening the matchbox, she held it up to her ear and shook it. Hearing the rustle of matches inside, she smiled with assurance, opened the box and pulled out a matchstick.

But the matchstick she took from the box was already burnt. The slightest bit embarrassed, she looked through the box and then in exasperation dumped them out on the table. “They’re all burnt! I can’t believe you would carry around burnt matches! My father would NEVER do anything like that!”

Korzybski gave her a rather impatient, knowing look and declared, “The world is a much bigger and more complicated place than you or even your father or your mother could ever imagine.”

He again placed the cigarette and holder on the table and continued his talk. After a few more minutes time, he pulled from his pocket a third box of matches and placed it on the table. This time the girl didn’t even wait for him to ready his cigarette. She immediately grabbed the box of matches, held it to her ear, and shook it.

Nothing.

She confidently set the matches back on the table, looked up at the pot-bellied, bald-headed man, and sat back in her chair — very proud of herself indeed.

Korzybski continued talking and slowly began preparing the cigarette. The girl didn’t move. When he was ready to light the cigarette, still continuing his talk, he picked up the box of matches, gave one end of the box a sharp poke with his finger, and the box opened. It was packed with fresh, unlit matches that had been jammed into the box such that there was no room for them to shake. He took one, struck it against the box, and lit his cigarette.

Korzybski puffed and continued with his lecture, while the girl sat silently beside — bewitched, bothered, bewildered, and a little bit smaller. A few months later, Korzybski returned to the school and was told that, indeed, the girl's behavior had changed since the meeting. She had begun to delay her reactions, and begun to act a little less "full of herself."

We should be careful to get out of an experience only the wisdom that is in it—and stop there; lest we be like the cat that sits down on a hot stove-lid. She will never sit down on a hot stove-lid again—and that is well; but also she will never sit down on a cold one anymore.
Mark Twain

To progress, man must re-make himself,
and he cannot re-make himself without suffering.
For he is both the marble and the sculptor.
Alexis Carrel

Other Descriptions of General Semantics

I've previously related some items of historical interest regarding Alfred Korzybski, including an excerpt from one of his early seminars in which he spoke about what general semantics *is,* what it may be considered to be *about,* what it concerns itself with, etc.

Throughout the years, many individuals have held and expressed their own opinions and perspectives about these same questions. Anyone can read Korzybski's *Science and Sanity,* Hayakawa's *Language in Thought and Action,* Johnson's *People in Quandaries,* or any book or article that deals with the subject, and then talk in terms such as, "This is what general semantics is about." And, one hopes, the talker will demonstrate an awareness of *to-me-ness, non-allness* and *etc.*, in his/her talking that follows. However, while we each may possess the *right* to an opinion, I would maintain that not all opinions are necessarily *right.* Some opinions reflect more understanding, more insightful interpretation, than others. Therefore, I opine that, especially for those of us who consider ourselves students of general semantics, it's important to continually seek to broaden and modify our own evaluations regarding *what general semantics is about.*

As a step toward this objective of ever-widening our perspectives as to *what general semantics is about,* I offer here some excerpts from six men with especially credible views on the subject. Each of these men not only read what Korzybski wrote, but knew him (and each other) with some degree of intimate familiarity. Each read Korzybski, listened to him lecture, asked him questions, talked with him "off-line" in social situations, in private conversations, etc. Each then took his own evaluative perspective of *what general semantics is about* and applied it, developed it, wrote about it, and taught it in his own unique manner. There-

fore, *credible* seems to me an appropriate term to apply to the opinions expressed by Wendell Johnson, Francis Chisholm, Russell Meyers, Ray Bontrager, Irving Lee, and Samuel Bois, on this particular subject.

These excerpts come from materials found in the Institute's archives.

Wendell Johnson

Wendell Johnson, Ph.D., author of *People In Quandaries, Your Most Enchanted Listener, Because I Stutter,* and dozens of published articles about general semantics, taught speech, general semantics, and performed clinical studies at the University of Iowa. The following excerpt comes from his opening lecture to his general semantics class in the fall of 1956. The course was broadcast live by the campus radio station, WSUI, and recorded on tape.

> This is a course which deals with the part that our use of words, designs — symbols of all kinds — tends to play in the development of our individual personalities, our institutions, and our human societies. So we shall be concerned in the course with the disorders of our symbolic processes, which is to say the language of maladjustment — the language which *reflects* maladjustment and which tends to *produce* maladjustment. We shall be even more concerned with the kinds of language which we are able to develop or cultivate which tend to be very effective, which tend to be conducive, to what we call "normal adjustment."
>
> Now, I am not too happy with this word *adjustment.* I do not mean by it some kind of self-satisfaction, some sort of blind acceptance of things as they are, but something much, much more dynamic and helpful than that. I mean by *adjustment,* by healthful adjustment, something that we might call the "realization of our own individual potentials for development." I don't mean being like somebody else, like the average man, or like the mold, but being oneself as fully as possible.

Well, there is a way to use language which tends to encourage this sort of development. Then there is a way to use language — there are probably many, many ways to use language — which tend to make it *difficult* to develop one's full potential, and so we will be concerned with these kinds of language. This means we're going to be concerned with things like speaking, writing, listening, reading, designing, and figuring with the pictures we make in our heads. We'll be concerned with the talking we do to ourselves that we recognize as thinking, and feeling, and imagining, and wishing, and regretting, and so forth.

We're going to be concerned especially with the language we use for talking ourselves *into* trouble, and that which we use for talking ourselves *out of* trouble. We are going to be concerned-because we're concerned so much with the language that is *effective* for the solving of problems and for the realization of potential self-development — we're going to be especially concerned with language in its most effective forms for the purpose of *solving problems.* This means we will be especially interested in the language used by scientific research workers, and also by others — outstanding novelists, poets, any of the users of language who are very effective in the solving of human problems.

If we are ever to become what we might have been,
we must cease being who we've become.

To a mouse, cheese is cheese.
That's why mousetraps work.

Wendell Johnson

Francis P. Chisholm

Francis P. Chisholm taught at State Teachers College in River Falls, Wisconsin. Perhaps best known for his *Introductory Lectures on General Semantics* (1945), he shares a distinction with S. I. Hayakawa as the only two men to present seminars sponsored by the Institute while Korzybski was alive. This article from 1949, "Positive Training for Maturity," was perhaps included as a special mailing to Institute members.

> Certain formulations of general semantics are extremely important in training maturity and sound mental health. It should be remembered that the aim is to get people to use these principles habitually in making their own evaluations. In other words, the aim of exercises suggested by these principles is to train ourselves and others in integrating the *delayed-reaction* order of response (scientific method in everyday situations).
>
> Children especially should be taught to talk, behave, etc ., *as if* they understood the following propositions. They should have practice in talking about situations in terms which reflect these scientific insights and what they say should be systematically re-stated to make this kind of description habitual.

1. The world is in process. Our descriptions, etc., (i.e., *maps*) should be *dated,* and changed as the territory changes. People, things, etc ., change, and cannot be treated exactly alike from day to day. No evaluation of myself is permanent. "I dislike what Carl does today," is better than "I hate Carl."
2. The *differences* between similar things are as important to us as the similarities. We should evaluate specific men or women, for example, more in terms of their individual characteristics than in terms of generalizations about *men* and *women.*
3. Scientific method in action means training ourselves to think in a definite *order.* Proper order involves these habits:
   Observation before talking.
   Description before evaluation.
   Facts before opinions.
   Understanding before judgment.
   Etc.

4. Language (or *map*) is about events (non-linguistic *territory*). We should check from "what I think the situation is" to the situation itself before action.
5. No description can tell *all* about the situation described. Every description is an *abstraction* from the situation. What else is there to say?
6. We give ourselves positive training in maturity by distinguishing carefully between:
   Hopes and predictions;
   Reports and inferences;
   Descriptions and feelings;
   Fantasy and report;
   Legend and history;
   Etc.
7. Predictions are never certain; they are more or less probable.
8. Explanations and hypotheses are not established by argument or intensity of belief; the scientific test is predictability in the territory.
9. The qualities and values (i.e., *sweet, sour,bravery*) that we see in things are values that we see there by our own nervous system's activity. We should be *conscious* of this projection. "The sea looks blue *to me* this afternoon." "What he did seems heroic *to me*."
10. Maturity is not any one set of opinions, but a way of evaluating situations. Immaturity is shown by:
    Egocentricity
    Two-valued (black and white) extreme evaluations Compulsive speech
    Internal insecurity
    Violent mood changes in response to slight changes in the situation
    Dogmatism and sureness of opinion
    Undue regard for tokens of approval, titles, etc.
    Etc.

    Maturity is shown by:
    Zest and interest
    Flexibility and relative efficiency
    Internal balance
    Social responsibility
    Etc.

11. Maximum transfer of learning occurs when the student understands the *structure* of a successful or unsuccessful reaction. When a student uses delayed reaction in a given context, he should understand the way in which he has used his nervous system for a successful result.
12. Generally, shock and frustration result from following maps which are unlike in structure to the situations they represent.
13. You cannot impose *values.* To change values you must change people. If you try to impose values, you make only fear.
14. Parents and teachers should distinguish between:
    Protection and protectiveness
    Area of child responsibility (within which he must stand on his decisions) and area of parent responsibility
    Etc.

    Under present world conditions, you cannot, in detail, tell your children what to think; but you can train them how to think and trust them to make better solutions than you have made.
    Etc.

Dr. Russell Meyers

Dr. Meyers chaired the Division of Neurosurgery at the University of Iowa and regularly participated in Institute seminar-workshops throughout the 1940s and 50s. This excerpt comes from the copious notes taken by Kenneth Johnson (later to become principal lecturer at Institute seminars, author and editor) during his first Institute seminar-workshop in August 1957.

> There are two premises we must operate on whenever we try to communicate. First, we must *expect* to be misunderstood. Second, we must *expect* to misunderstand. This may seem "obvious" but too few human beings act *as if* it were true. We are striving to minimize misunderstanding, not to eliminate it. This is true not only of *inter*-personal but *intra*-personal communication.
>
> Communication can be competent or incompetent; it can lead to improvement or to destruction.
>
> General Semantics is less interested in answers to examination questions than in personal behavior in day-to-day situations. It

grew out of a comparison of the kinds of behavior that have led to adaptation and the kinds that have led to mis-adaptation.

Most of GS is unspeakable. It must be experienced and practiced over a period of time. Concepts basic to General Semantics:

- Scientific method -generalized
- Communication
- Evaluation
- Creativity

The scientific method is not a very old formulation. As it is now taught, it dates back to about 1892 and the book *Grammar of Science.* The notion that this method can be generalized is peculiar to GS.

Alfred Korzybski compared the efficient communication behavior of scientists to the inefficient behavior of 'mental' cases. He then took those kinds of adaptive behavior that could be identified and taught and generalized them for everyday use.
The aim of GS is robust psychological health, not merely correcting or preventing maladjustment.

0. R. Bontrager

Ray Bontrager, Ph.D., Professor of Education and Psychology at California State College (Pennsylvania), then later at Arizona State University, served as the primary lecturer at most Institute winter and summer seminar-workshops from 1951 through 1965. The following excerpt also comes from Ken Johnson's notes taken from the August 1957 seminar-workshop. This is a summary of Bontrager's introductory lecture that began that seminar.

Semantic reactions or, as I prefer to call it, *human behavior*, is what we will be talking about, particularly that behavior which is uniquely human, that behavior which makes you different from your cat.

Semantic reactions are not something we can turn off and on. You are semantic reacting right now. You came here expecting something. This is a semantic reaction. How did you know what to ex-

pect? What do you expect? That's important. It's important because what you expect will determine what you get out of this seminar. Your premises psychologically channelize you. (Bontrager used silly putty to demonstrate how we may be channelized to expect something other than what happens.)

General Semantics is a new system. It is not an old one and it cannot be evaluated in terms of any other system. It is not a cure-all, not a panacea.

Some people come here to learn how to make something better and faster. They are not going to get it.

Some come expecting something on words. I'm going to say precious little about words. I'm going to talk about behavior.

Some people expect GS to be a quick course in "how to fool others." It is not.
Some come here for a quick shot of psychiatry. If that's what you want, don't come here. I need a psychiatrist myself.

Some come looking for a fight. I'm the most peace-loving man you ever met.

One man came to one of these seminars to find out "how I can get them to listen to me." It never occurred to him to listen for a while.

I cannot predict your expectations or your reactions to this seminar. I will simply talk about GS as I see it. Not as everyone sees it, *but as I see it.*

First, I would like each one of you to write down the following statement on a small card and sign it.

> "I understand that I am not required to believe a single thing I hear Bontrager say or a single thing I read while attending this seminar."

All right. Now on the back of the card write your reactions to being asked to sign such a goofy statement.

(Bontrager then discussed these reactions, pointing out that members of the group are behaving right now, that their sensitivity, their defensiveness, their embarrassment or tenseness are all semantic reactions .)

Do you make mistakes? I do. We all do, and we should learn to face that fact. Trace the history of any subject and you will find a series of mistakes. Yet when we talk we make statements and then proceed to make them sacred. Most of us cannot tolerate criticism of our statements.

Now I would like you to react to this statement:

"I saw a DOG."

I would like you to write down the color and the breed. Now let's hear what some of you wrote. (Members of the group answer, *black, brown,* etc .)
Now where did those ideas come from? Not from me, certainly.

They came from your own nervous systems. Whenever you read or listen you are doing this same thing — you are filling in, putting meaning into words from your own nervous system. Reading and listening is like making a scenario. Try to remember that as you read and listen.

Irving J. Lee

Irving J. Lee, Ph.D., taught Speech at Northwestern University and produced two of the most widely-read books on general semantics, *Language Habits in Human Affairs* and *The Language of Wisdom and Folly.* One of Korzybski's acknowledged favorites, he died in 1955 when he was only 46 years old. Admired by many as a "master teacher," one can only speculate as to how the development of general semantics might have been different had he not died so young. The following is taken from a transcript of his address delivered at the first conference on general semantics in Chicago, June 22, 1951, titled "The Semantic Man."

In 1946, 1 had just taken off that Air Force uniform and managed to persuade Alfred Korzybski to let me pose some questions to him. I had a number of things that bothered me. I had read that "blue peril" (*Science and Sanity*) and there were paragraphs in it that made no sense even after the fifteenth reading. I wanted the opportunity to confront him with these paragraphs. I wanted to say: "Now, Alfred, what did you mean when you said this?" And he very kindly agreed to submit to some such questioning, over a period of several afternoons.

At one of these sessions, I said, "Now, Alfred, you have been thinking about this stuff for a very long time. Can you tell me, in a nutshell, what are you trying to do? What is the objective of all this reading and studying and talking and sweating that you go through day after day, year after year? What are you after?"

I never could call on him in those sessions without being forced to take notes. If I came without a pencil and paper, he invariably found a pad and pencil, and "take some notes" was the continuous refrain. Well, I have gone over those notes many times and in answer to that question, this is almost a verbatim account of what he said.

"Irving, we are trying to produce a new sort of man." I wish I could do it with the accent that he gave to that "new sort of man." "A man who will have no new virtues, but we will know how to describe him and, maybe, we will know how to create him."

And, as I recall the rest of that discussion, Alfred went on to say that he thought that in the discipline that he had helped to fashion, there was a way to describe a "new sort of man." He then said, "It will be very easy to describe him. I did it in *Science and Sanity,* and you will be able very quickly after you read that to know exactly what kind of man it is."

I was very much taken at the time with this point of view and someday, perhaps in 1960 or 1965, I am going to write a book with a number of chapters which will describe this kind of man. And, I have been trying to provide, or create, or draw for myself a profile, a profile of the characteristics of a man who in his behavior would embody the stuff that is in that blue book.

J. Samuel Bois

Samuel Bois, a clinical psychologist and management consultant from Montreal, attended his first seminar with Korzybski in 1945. He extended the work of general semantics in two major books, *Explorations in Awareness* and *The Art of Awareness,* introducing such notions as his *semantic transactor* model and the term *What Is Going On* (WIGO) to refer to the event level of the parabola in Korzybski's Structural Differential. The following summary of Bois' opening lecture at the 1950 summer seminar-workshop was written by Dick Brenneman, a student.

> Relax. .. enjoy yourself. .. please, for the time, forget all of your personal problems and those tremendous world problems — forget those, too. It is impossible to absorb the methodology of General Semantics if you are tense and preoccupied with all the interminable woes of the universe.
> If I see any of you reflecting the tenseness of survival problems, I will refuse to talk to you. I will say, "Go see the expert Charlotte [Schuchardt] and relax." After all, life's not so bad — for heaven's sake, enjoy it.
>
> There is an old Aristotelian, traditional aesthetic view that for anything to be beneficial, it must be hard. I say, "poof!" —just wait and see.
>
> Well, what is this GS? What was this guy Korzybski talking about anyway, eh? What sort of double-talk did he throw at us — *whatever you say it is, it isn't!* Where the devil did he get this name *General Semantics?*
>
> First of all, we will not quibble about words! I will not stand for that. You must remember that Samuel Bois has already stood under one inquisition. He knows how insane it is to quibble over words. AK told us one thing if he told us nothing else — "The words are not the things."

It is our function as time-binders to improve science and civilization. If we think verbally we project the structure of our language on such phenomena as we observe and so are in a rut.

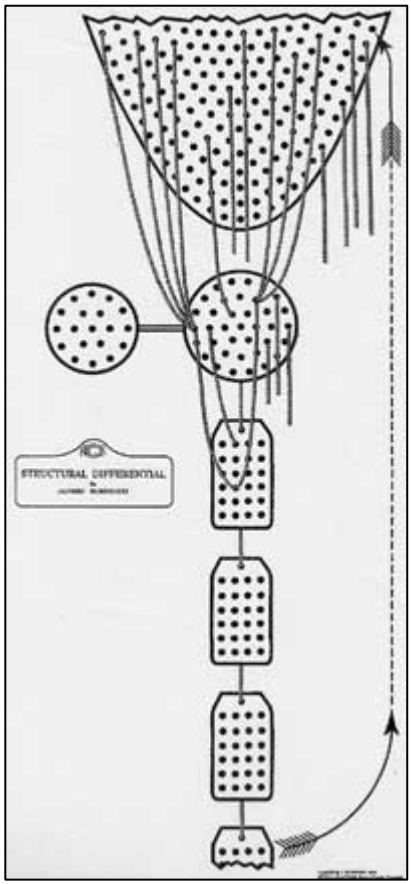
How and where do we start to get out of this rut? Right at home. Don't wait for a dramatic opportunity to practice GS on the floor of the United Nations. Practice it in the prison cell, if necessary. We can and we must practice and create better methods of cooperation in whatever human group we join.

So remember this, that family life is the most effective bio-cultural and bio-social training laboratory that we have available to us.

"Calling Out the Symbol Rulers" the 1st Annual Dr. Sanford I. Berman Lecture

In October 2004, I was invited to give the inaugural Dr. Sanford I. Berman Lecture at the University of Nevada Las Vegas. A six-minute excerpt and the full 56-minute lecture are both available to watch online: http://www.thisisnotthat.com/video/mp-unlv.html

An Explanation of the Structural Differential



Alfred Korzybski developed this diagram in the 1920's as a means to visualize the process he called *abstracting*. Originally a three-dimensional, free-standing model (imagine a colander, or strainer, in place of the ragged parabola at the top), this printed version appeared in his source book for general semantics, *Science and Sanity*. (1)

Abstracting, in the context of Korzybski's model, refers to physio-logical-neurological activities, or processes, that occur on non-verbal levels. These abstracting processes begin when our nervous systems are stimulated by something we see, hear, taste, touch, or smell.

The parabola represents an environment (the world around us) consisting of innumerable characteristics or events, depicted by the holes, or dots (activities, people, things, etc., including what occurs on microscopic and sub-microscopic (inferred) levels. Only some of these characteristics (the hanging strings) can be detected by human senses. Those which connect to the circle represent a specific object sensed by a specific nervous system, which has *abstracted* a particular set of characteristics (those connective strings) from all

possible characteristics occurring in the parabola. These initial sensory data are further abstracted and transformed as the nervous system/brain recognizes and associates the data with a word or label. The tag below the circle represents the *descriptive* level of abstracting, the first level of verbal awareness.

From the descriptive level, the verbal abstracting process proceeds with the *inference* levels that can continue indefinitely (implied by the ragged bottom tag). In other words, from our *descriptions* of events we form *inferences*, assumptions, opinions, beliefs, etc., by generalizing this experience with our past experiences. And we can continue, indefinitely, to form different inferences from one experience, which may then be subsequently recalled in future experiences, noted by the arrow and dotted line to the right.

As we become aware of these sensory experiences, we can talk about them, describe them, express how we feel, what they mean, etc.

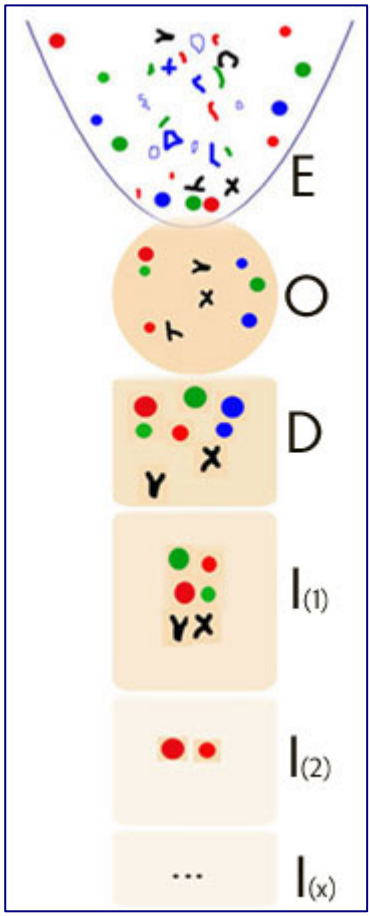
Throughout this abstracting process, we need to remember that what we talk about is not the same thing that our brain registers as an experience, which is also not the same as our initial sensing, which is in turn not the same as the actual stimulus or event. Abstracting is something that your body-brain-nervous-system does continually, regardless of whether you're aware of it.

The *differential* in *structural differential* refers to a functional difference between humans and animals. An animal's ability to abstract, depicted by the circle to the left, is limited; a human can continue to abstract and make inferences indefinitely.

The different levels that Korzybski defines in the model refer to aspects of the overall process which seem to consist of clearly-differentiated orders, or types, of activity — from perception, to nervous system construction of the experience, to cognitive evaluation, to our response or reaction.

"So what?" is a reasonable question to ask at this point. What practical difference can this *differential* make?

Let me try another explanation and then illustrate an example. The following figure depicts my own simplified version of Korzybski's structural differential model.



E The parabola represents "what is going on" (WIGO), or what we *infer* is going on, in the world around us. Each dot, figure, and line stands for an aspect or characteristic of the sub-microscopic process level, or **E**vent level, which comprises WIGO.

O The circle labeled for **O**bject represents a human nervous system (let's assume mine) interacting with WIGO. Through my sensing organs and brain, I construct the sights, sounds, smells, etc., that result in my experiences. My experiences are incomplete and unique to my nervous system.

D The first verbal level in the abstracting process is labeled as **D**escriptive. What I say, think, etc., at this level about my experience should be limited, as much as possible, to just the facts as I experienced them.

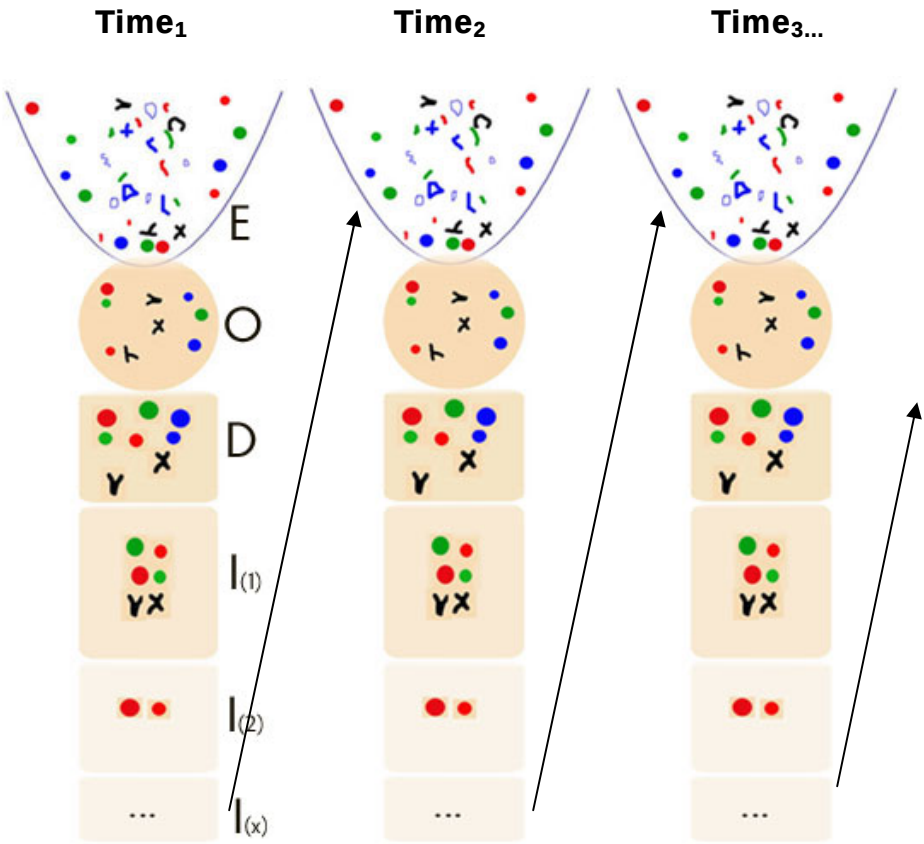
I The **I** tags represent the multiple levels of **I**nferences I might construct from my experience. These inferences will determine what meaning or significance I draw from this experience. As indicated, I can generate as many inferences, beliefs, theories, judgments, conclusions, etc., as I might care to.

It's important to remember *how time, order, or sequence* plays into this model. Each level of the abstracting process occurs in a given *order*, i.e.:

1. Something happens (Event);
2. I sense what happens (Object);
3. I recognize what happens (Description);
4. I generate meanings for what happens; etc. (Inferences)

We can depict a succession of these abstracting processes over time, one after the other, for every moment of our lives. In this case, with successive abstracting processes, we can see how

the inferences (or meanings) we generate from every experience can factor into later experiences.



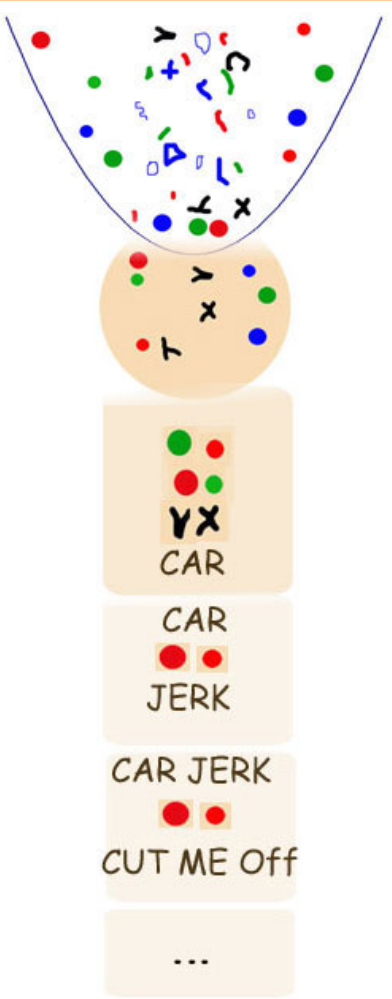
In terms of *differentiation*, we should note that:

1. What happens *(Event)* **is NOT ...**
2. What I sense non-verbally within my nervous system *(Object)*, which **is NOT ...**
3. What I can describe verbally about my sensing *(Description)*, which **is NOT ...**
4. The meaning(s) I generate based on what happened; etc. *(Inferences)*

Similarly, our experience/inference/meaning at $Time_3$ is not the same experience/inference/meaning at $Time_1$ but due to

projection and memory, what we experience at $Time_1$ may well affect our $Time_3$ experience and what that experience means.

Let's take a situation in which a friend — call her Emily — relates with some anger an experience she just had while driving to the store … *"somebody cut me off!"* Here's an example of deconstructing her experience to emphasize the different 'levels' between **what she experienced** and **what she evaluated**.



Event: What is Going On? Street, traffic, trees, rain, wipers … plus microscopic and sub-microscopic particles and activities that we cannot observe, but which we infer based on current science.

Object: Emily's eyes capture (some of the) reflected light from (some of the) images in her (limited) field of view; the light is transformed (abstracted) by her visual system into nervous system signals that travel to her brain; neurons in her brain process the electrical/chemical signals and cause her to **see** …

Description: I was driving about 25 miles per hour, perhaps 50 feet from the car ahead. A dark vehicle driven by a middle-aged man emerged from my right field of view. He was going faster than me. His car suddenly accelerated and veered into the lane directly in front of me, reducing my following distance to no more than 10 feet, which **meant …**

$Inference_1$: This guy's a rude jerk because …

$Inference_2$: **He cut me off and almost made me have a wreck!**

$Inference_x$: I'm too upset to go to work. I need to go home and play with my dog.

Can you see that "he cut me off" is **not** *what happened?* Can you see that Emily's reaction to *what happened* is not the same as a *description* of what happened?

One of the powerful lessons of general semantics, illustrated by the use of this type of model to analyze the abstracting process, is that we can better train ourselves to respond condition**ally** to *what happens* to us. We humans don't have to react with a condition**ed** respond like Pavlov's dog, reacting to a substitute stimulus *as if* it were 'real' — but we often do. Our language helps confuse us, because we tend to say things like, "Ooh, it made me so mad!" We allow the *it* — the *event*, the *what happens*, the *stimulus* — to determine our *response*. You need to remember that between the stimulus and your response, there is a **YOU** who, to some degree, can control your response:

STIMULUS -----> YOU -----> RESPONSE
Time(1) -------> Time(2)-------> Time(3)

Again, *'time'* is an important aspect of our condition**al** responses. Remember the old adage encouraging you to count to 10 before getting mad? There's a lot of merit to be gained by practicing your ability to consciously — condition**ally** — *delay* your responses.

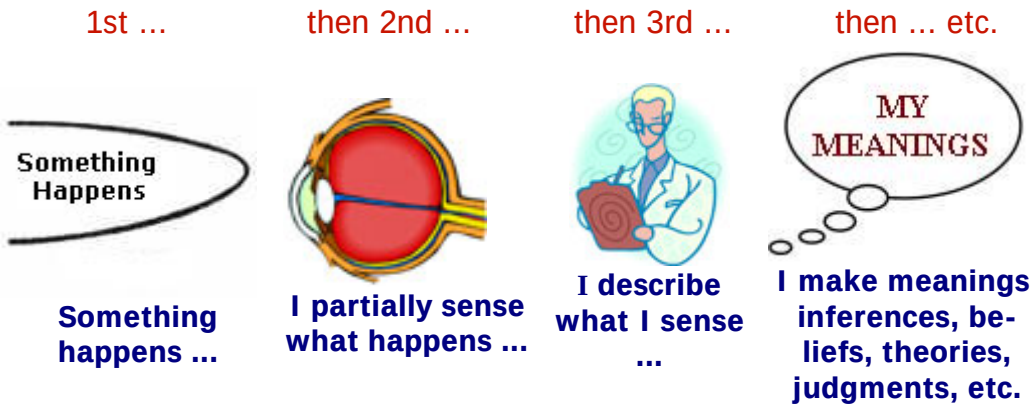
A Summary

- *Abstracting* refers to ongoing physiological-neurological processes that occur on *non-verbal levels.*
- We can *verbally* differentiate certain phases, or *levels* or *orders*, of the abstracting process to analyze our behaviors and reactions:
  EVENT is *not* **OBJECT** is *not* **DESCRIPTION** is *not* **INFERENCE**, etc.
- We can acknowledge that our abstracting occurs at different times ... we should expect different results, reactions, responses, etc., from different experiences occurring at different times.

- We have human limitations that constrain all of our experiences — we never experience *all* of what happens.
- Similarly, we can never *say all* or describe *all* about our experiences; more could always be said. *Etc.*
- What we experience is, to some degree, a function of our past experiences (feedback, projection, etc.).
- What we experience is a function of the unique capabilities and limitations of our own individual nervous system.
- We should therefore expect not only to *see* things differently, we should expect to *evaluate* and *react* to things differently.
- When we *delay* our responses and react condition**ally**, we tend to behave more sanely, more rationally, more appropriately to the facts of the situation and our experience.

When we react immediately, when our responses are condition**ed** and controlled by the *stimulus* (the 'thing'), we behave like Pavlov's dog and subject ourselves to control by others.

You can use this model and process whenever you want to analyze the behavior, responses, reactions, etc., of a particular individual in a specific situation. (Personally, I find this type of analysis works best when the *particular individual* happens to be my ownself.) Remember that the structural differential model, or any similar model, represents the process of *abstracting*.



The more you apply this process to analyze your own abstracting, evaluating, inference-making, belief-generating, etc.:

- you will become more aware and conscious of your own abstracting;
- you will better differentiate between: 1) what happens; 2) what you sense of what happens; 3) what you describe of what your senses sense; and 4) what you infer from what you've described;
- you will respond more conditionally to what happens in your life;
- you will experience less conditioned responses (less like Pavlov's dog);
- you will delay more of your responses, leap to fewer conclusions, snap to fewer judgments, and make fewer inappropriate assumptions;
- you will _____ (fill in your own benefit).

For more on Korzybski: http://thisisnotthat.com/video/mp-ak.html

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Out of time we cut *days* and *nights, summers* and *winters*. We say what each part of the sensible continuum is, and all these abstract *whats* are concepts. The intellectual life of man consists almost wholly in his substitution of a conceptual order for the perceptual order in which his experience originally comes.
William James (2)

Ultimately, we attach meaning to experience.
Gifford Pinchot III (3)

You can't make me what you call me!
Al Fleishman (4)

A political victory, a rise of rents, the recovery of your sick, or the return of your absent friend, or some other favorable event, raises your spirits, and you think good days are preparing for you. Do not believe it. Nothing can bring you peace but yourself.
Ralph Waldo Emerson (5)

13 Symptoms of Language Misbehaviors

To varying degrees, we are prone to commit these, and other, language behaviors that reflect inappropriate evaluations, i.e., our language 'maps' do not properly reflect what we 'know' about the territories of our external, and internal, 'worlds':

1. We fail to differentiate facts (verifiable, historical observations/events) from inferences, assumptions, premises, beliefs, etc.

2. We try to force two-valued, either-or, black-white, etc., distinctions on events and situations which more appropriately ought to be thought of in terms of gradations, i.e., relative to other points along a spectrum rather than absolutely one or the other.

3. We fail to account for multiple causes for any particular event, both in dimension of breadth (what other factors affected the result?) and sequence (what caused "the cause"?); we tend to simplistically focus on seeking 'the' (singular) cause.

4. We fail to recognize the uniqueness of our own experiences; we forget that almost every statement — to include descriptions, judgments, opinions, etc. — we make could be prefaced, or appended, by "to me".

5. We fall victim to the false-to-facts structural flaw of the subject/predicate grammatical form, particularly with respect to unaware use of the "is" of identity and predication; "That boy

is a discipline problem." "The rose is red." The form implies a factual relationship between the subject and predicate, as though the label ("discipline problem") and color ("red") were actually properties or qualities 'in' the subjects, rather than descriptions reflecting the evaluations made by the speaker.

6. We objectify processes or high order abstractions as things, or nouns, and speak about them as though they have properties similar to 'real', non-verbal 'things'; the weather, the economy, the handling of the crisis, truth, honesty, justice, security, privacy, etc.

7. We tend to look more for similarities than we do differences; within a group (or a label for a group) we assume similarities that do not necessarily exist and fail to see the individual differences: let's get a 'woman's perspective', look at it from the 'black point of view'; all liberals are this way; all conservatives believe ....

8. We fail to account for the fact that every 'thing' - including every person - changes over time; we should not expect that Bob_{2002} has the same priorities, attitudes, interests, policies, fears, expectations, etc., as did Bob_{1982}.

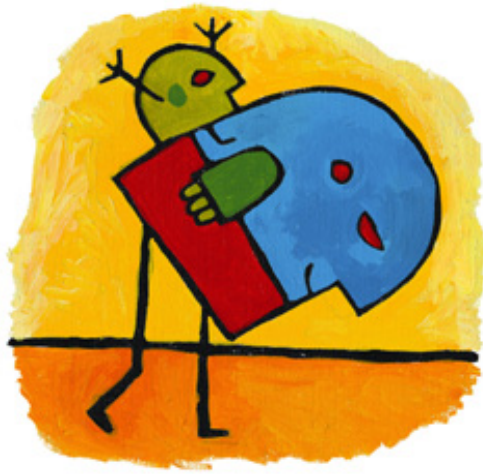
9. We talk in absolute, all-inclusive terms that do not reflect the facts of our limited experiences; we cannot experience 'all' or 'everything' of 'anything'. Avoid unaware and inappropriate use of absolute terms (exact same, never, always, all, none, absolutely, without exception) and remember the etc. - more can always be said.

10. We ought to acknowledge that whatever we 'know,' 'believe', or 'assume' is derived from incomplete information, therefore we ought to hold our conclusions, judgments, beliefs, and assumptions rather tentatively, subject to revision should subsequent 'facts' or events indicate.

11. We often confuse the subject noun (actor) and the object noun (recipient of the action). When we say things like, “She hurt my feelings,” and “He was mean to me,” we assign the ‘action’, or the feelings of ‘hurt’ and ‘mean’ to someone else, instead of accepting that we generated the feelings. Catch yourself when you say, “It makes me _____” — what is “it” and what does “it” do when “it” “makes”?

12. We avoid taking responsibility for our own evaluations, judgments, and opinions, when we: 1) generalize “you” when you mean “I” (How did it feel to hit the winning shot? “Well, you’ve got so much going on that you can’t think about it, you just have to go on your instincts.”); and 2) attribute to some undefined “it” (“It just shows you that it’s never too late for it to teach you a lesson.”).

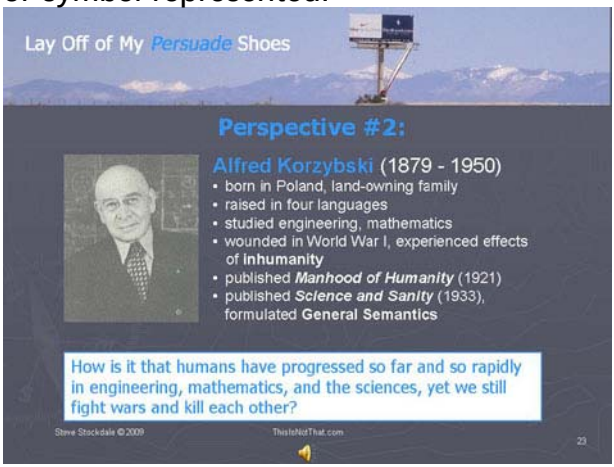
13. Avoid perpetuating inappropriate, outdated notions such as myths, superstitions, jinxes, etc.; e.g. “13” is an unlucky number. Remember the principle behind Chinese water torture ... the cumulative effects of a simple thing can, over time, become significant.



A General Semantics Perspective

(From the "Lay Off of My PERSUADE Shoes" presentation, available under **SUPPLEMENTARIES**.)

Alfred Korzybski was born in 1879 to a land-owning family in Poland. He was raised by servants from four different countries who spoke four different languages. So he grew up with a working knowledge of Polish, Russian, German, and French. In this type of multi-lingual environment, it came naturally to Korzybski to disassociate the word, or symbol, from the thing that the word or symbol represented.



As a student he studied engineering, mathematics, and chemistry. When the first World War erupted in 1914, he was enlisted into the Russian cavalry. Not only was he severely wounded, but he witnessed first hand the devastating effects of all the new weapons of war that debuted during this "war to end all wars" ... airplanes, armored tanks, rapid-fire machine guns, poison gas.

He was sent to North America toward the end of the war when he could no longer serve on the battlefield. He supported artillery testing in Canada before transferring to the U.S. where he traveled the country speaking to groups and selling war bonds. After the war, he remained in the U.S. and married a woman from Chicago.

He was haunted by his experiences during the war. As an engineer, he pondered this question: How is it that humans have progressed so far and so rapidly in engineering, mathematics, and the sciences, yet we still fight wars and kill each other?

He devoted the rest of his life obsessed with this problem. In 1921 he published his first book, Manhood of Humanity. Then in 1933, he wrote what became the source book for the field of study we know as General Semantics …. Science and Sanity.

Now, I realize that the focus of this presentation is not General Semantics. But since I've taught the subject for the past four years to "mass communications practitioners" I'd like to say a few words about it because it does represent a perspective that I think is important.

The definition I've come to use with my university students is this: *General semantics deals with the study of how we perceive, construct, evaluate and then express our life experiences through our language-behaviors.*

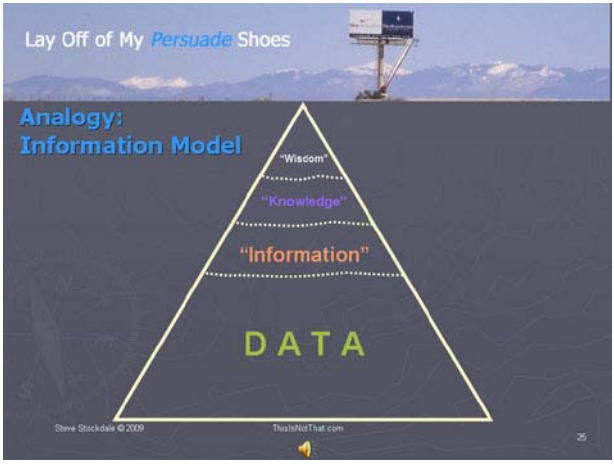
Note that I've connected language and behavior with a hyphen and refer to language-behavior. I think most people usually talk in terms of language AND behavior as though the two are separated and not associated. But in General Semantics we consider language as something that humans, something that you and I as individuals, do … it's a part of our behavior just as much as our breathing, our eating, our laughing, our crying, our working or playing.

We *do* language. And because our language-behaviors are so integral to human cooperation, as well as human conflict, Korzybski spent his life observing, understanding, and

documenting this process of perceiving, constructing, evaluating and then responding.

He developed a model or a diagram for visualizing and understanding what he referred to as the abstracting process. But as a way to introduce that, I want to first show you a similar model that you might already be familiar with.

I learned this as the "Information Theory" model. It's simply a pyramid divided into four sections:



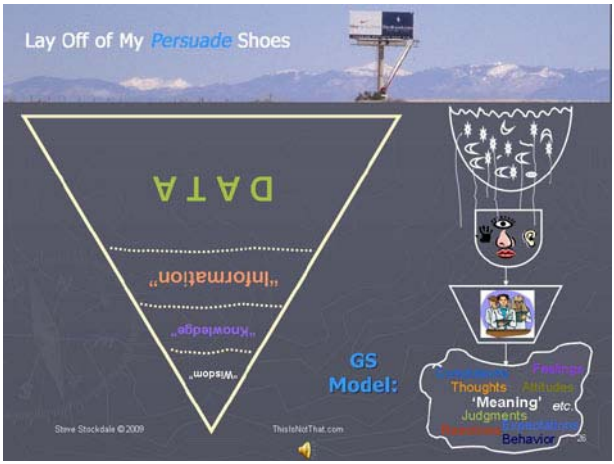
The largest section on the bottom is labeled "data". Above that is a smaller section labeled "information." Then a smaller section labeled "knowledge", and then a top section labeled "wisdom." (Sometimes the "wisdom" section isn't included, and other labels could be substituted for it.)

But the point of the model is to show the relationships that: from much data, we derive (or to use Korzybski's term, we abstract) usable information, from which we can further abstract what we call knowledge … and then wisdom.

So it's as though we filter out the data that doesn't concern us, we keep and use what does, and from that we construct "information" that we find meaningful. Then we further filter what we've labeled as information that results in what we label knowledge.

Here's a quick example. Take everything that I'm saying as a part of this presentation, as well as every slide and media clip. Every word and every image can be considered a single item of data. As you observe and listen, some of the words and images will amount to nothing more than noise … but some of it (I hope, a lot of it) will register with you as something that's relevant or

meaningful as information. And when it's over, perhaps you'll say that you learned something and feel more knowledgeable.



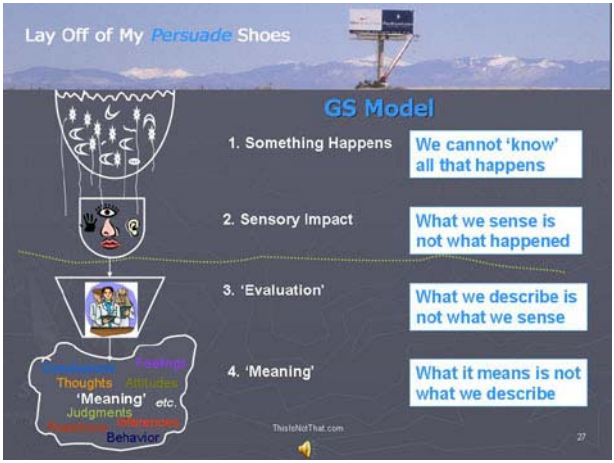
Now let's look at Korzybski's model as similar to this Information model, after we've turned it upside down. Each level compares generally to its corresponding level in the Information model.

Remember that this GS model is diagramming or 'mapping' the process of how we perceive, construct, evaluate, and respond to our life experiences.

The first step in this process of experiencing is that ... well, there's some kind of an experience. Something Happens. It's important for us to realize and be aware that, as humans with finite sensory abilities, we cannot know or experience everything that happens. There are limits to what we can see, hear, smell, touch and taste. So there's a lot more that happens ... there's a lot a more DATA ... than what we can experience.

Secondly, through our senses we interact with our environment. Within the limits of our sensing capabilities, we detect whatever is happening. But it's important to remember that not only can we not sense everything, but what we do sense is to some degree unique to our individual sensory abilities. We each have a different sensory acuity when it comes to our vision, our hearing, our taste discrimination.

And it's also important to remember that what we sense is not "what happened" ... our sense experience is an imperfect abstraction of what happened that's been filtered, you could say, or constructed by the nervous system.



The next part of the process, labeled as "evaluation," represents the first verbal level in which we can describe, or cognitively recognize, what our senses tell us about the experience. But again, what we can say or think or write about the experience, is NOT the experience itself.

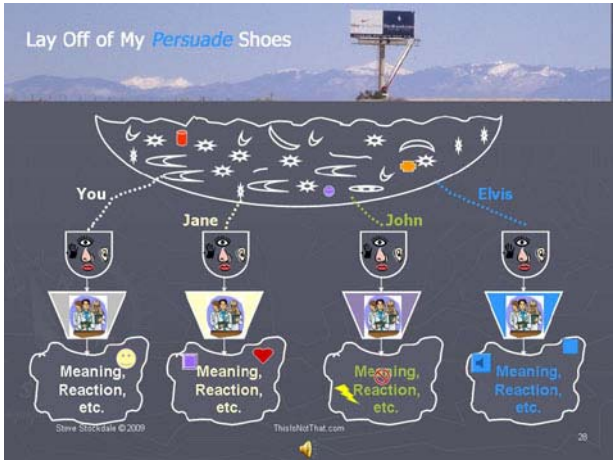
The fourth level then, after the descriptive phase, is labeled as "meaning" ... what the experience means is something more or different than just how we describe it.

So to summarize this process of abstracting:

- What we can sense is NOT what actually happens.
- What we can describe is something other than what we actually sense.
- What an experience means is something more than just what we can describe. What an experience means is the result of this filtering, or abstracting process in which each stage represents a different activity of a physiological process.

As an example, let's consider again what's going on in this room. The "goings on" or "things that are happening" are experienced by each one of you as different individuals. Each of you sees and hears what goes on slightly differently than anyone else.

In the diagram, you see four individuals experiencing the same happening. But we start to see differences in their individual abstracting processes at the evaluation stage, or the third level of describing what they experienced. Let's say they were each asked to write a simple report of "what happened" during today's meeting.



Jane may give a detailed summation of each part of the meeting, as if she were preparing the minutes. John might comment only on the business that was conducted and simply state there followed a program. Elvis might describe what he selected from the lunch buffet in detail, skip over the business matters, and summarize points from my presentation. So each individual's report might be colored or flavored differently.

But then in the final step of the process we can really see the differences between each our hypothetical observers. What they individually got out of this meeting, or what the meeting meant to them, varies a great deal.

In this case, "You" enjoyed it, without any reaction one way or the other. Jane, however, loved it. John didn't really care for it and lost interest, but while his thoughts drifted to a problem he has at work he had a brainstorm he can't wait to go back to implement. Elvis was left wondering about how any of this related to shoes.

So that's a basic introduction to the abstracting process that's central to the GS understanding of how we perceive, construct, evaluate, and respond to our life experiences.

Read the full presentation of "Lay Off of My PERSUADE Shoes" in SUPPLEMENTARIES.

For the full narrated Powerpoint presentation, or selected segments available online:

http://www.thisisnotthat.com/video/mp-aaf.html

PART 3
Extensions and Applications

Toward an Informed World View

A Radical Proposition: We ought to do what we know.

In other words, we ought to apply our knowledge. We ought to act and behave in accordance with what we have learned about ourselves and about how the world works.

The world in which we live is a world of *differences*. Of course it's also important to recognize similarities — that's the basis for our human capabilities to create and manipulate symbols such as spoken and written language, drawings, icons, even thinking. But when we lazily, ignorantly, or erroneously disregard *differences*, we don't behave in accordance with what we know. Troubles inevitably follow.

Therefore this human capability to critically *differentiate*, or *discern*, between **this** and ***that*** provides a foundation for our individual, and collective, humanness.

I advocate teaching and applying an informed world view deliberately derived from what we currently understand about ourselves and our world ... without deference to dogmas, traditions, or what passes for culturally-dependent "common sense."

A Fundamental Premise

What we perceive as 'the world' *is not* 'the world out there' — what we perceive is merely an abstraction of 'the world out there,' mediated through each individual's nervous system.

This simple observation was asserted by Alfred Korzybski as a fundamental premise of the methodology he called *general semantics* in his 1933 book, *Science and Sanity*. Using a simple push-toy bladed fan, he later explained: "Now I rotate the blades. And you see a disc, where there is no disc. Don't call that *illusion*. It's *abstraction* ..."(1)
[Watch: http://thisisnotthat.com/video/mp-ak.html]

Seventy-two years later (2005), neurobiologist Christof Koch, author of *The Quest for Consciousness: A Neurobiological Approach*, validated Korzybski's premise: "Conscious perception is, in a sense, a con job of the brain. It suggests there's a stable world out there and there's a very simple relationship between what's out there in the world and what's inside our head but in fact it's a very complicated relationship. It's actively constructed by our brain. We're now beginning to understand that what I see in my head is actually constructed by my head, by my neurons ... So clearly this naive, realistic view that there's a world, there's my head and this simple mapping, it can't be true."(2) [Watch: http://thisisnotthat.com/video/mp-koch-demo.html]

Jeff Hawkins, founder of Palm Computing, author of the best-selling *On Intelligence* (2004, with Sandra Blakeslee), and founder of the Redwood Center for Theoretical Neuroscience, stated in 2009: "Your perception of the world is really a fabrication of your model of the world. You don't really see light or sound. You perceive it because your model says this is how the world is, and those patterns invoke the model. It's hard to believe, but it really is true."(3) [Watch: http://thisisnotthat.com/video/mp-hawkins.html]

V.S. Ramachandran, MD, Director of the Center for Brain and Cognition and Professor with the Psychology Department and Neurosciences Program at the University of California, San Diego, and Adjunct Professor of Biology at the Salk Institute, in *A Brief Tour of Human Consciousness: From Impostor Poodles to Purple Numbers*, put it this way: "Our brains are essentially modelmaking machines. We need to construct useful, virtual reality simulations of the world that we can act on." (4)

Francis Crick, in *Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul*, stated: "What you see is not what is really there; it is

what your brain believes is there... Seeing is an active, constructive process. Your brain makes the best interpretation it can according to its previous experiences and the limited and ambiguous information provided by your eyes." (5)

The consequences of this straightforward scientific understanding ought to extend to the language(s) we use to learn, understand, and teach ... about *everything*, beginning with a deliberate, defensible, and informed *world view*.

Fundamental Aspects of an Informed World View

1. A View About Ourselves.

To varying degrees, we each have common human capabilities and limitations. We have imperfect sensing capabilities. We have nervous systems that can mislead and misinform us. We have physiological and neurological limitations. In this respect we are all "in the same boat," but yet we are each uniquely-individual human beings with different-sized and types of paddles, so to speak. If we don't acknowledge these differences in our capabilities and limitations, we will misunderstand our perceptions of the world around us.

[More: http://thisisnotthat.com/limitations.html]

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2. A View About the World.

We are a part of the natural world. We can observe that world, and ourselves, from the perspective of a problem-solving, or scientific, attitude. We can observe, create theories or assumptions, test those theories, then based on results, apply, modify, or discard them. We get into trouble when we ignore this process and rely on unchallenged or untested assumptions, beliefs, or feelings. An important aspect of a scientific approach is predictability. How well does what you know, or what you learn through questioning and testing, prepare you for the future?

[More: http://thisisnotthat.com/works.html]

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3. A View About Perspective.

Each person carries a background of unique-to-them experiences. Each comes from unique family, societal, religious, and political cultures. Each will interpret events or situations differently. Each has different sensing abilities. Perspectives change over time, depend on context, but remain personally unique. Can you really see from another's perspective, or walk in another's shoes? Can you recognize and acknowledge how your perspective may be different from another's?

[More: http://thisisnotthat.com/perspective.html]

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4. A View About Behavioral Consequences.

We react to the events, people, and situations we encounter. We can deliberately evaluate our experiences before we react. We have the cognitive means to respond to events *conditionally*—not automatically, like Pavlov's dog. However, we often allow certain words, labels, symbols, etc., to determine our reactions, rather than responding to the real-world referents the labels stand for. Sometimes we fail to delay our actions, judgments, and responses. We jump to conclusions, overlook details, and don't critically differentiate *this* experience from similar experiences. Sometimes we allow ourselves to be fooled, managed, and manipulated when we don't vigilantly guard against mistaking the *word* as the *thing*, or when we fail to discern that *the map is not the territory.*

[More: http://thisisnotthat.com/behavior.html]

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5. A View About Language.

Every everyday language results from choices made by humans—some deliberate, some accidental, some arbitrary. No language can be considered inherent, or inerrant. Language constitutes one

critical aspect of human behavior, perhaps the defining feature for humans. Our languages ought to adapt to reflect what we know about ourselves in our world.

[More: http://thisisnotthat.com/language.html]

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6. A View About Learning and Doing What We Know.

We can learn from our own experiences, others' experiences, books, media, etc. We can learn from virtually any kind of experience or source. Language provides the means through which most of our learning occurs. The quality of our learned knowledge, is dependent on the quality of our language behaviors and our evaluative judgments that guide our behaviors. But simply *learning* or *knowing* makes no difference unless that knowledge is reflected in our behaviors. Do we *do* what we *know*? Are our motivations and expectations consistent with our knowledge and experience, as well as appropriate to each new situation?

[More: http://thisisnotthat.com/seeds.html]

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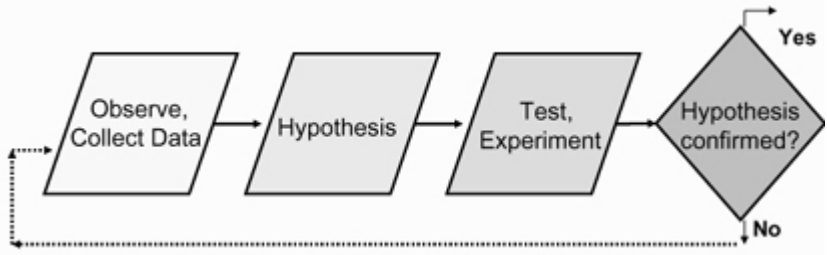
7. Putting It All Together.

How can we integrate, construct, and articulate a deliberate, informed world view that's predicated on this fundamental premise of differences? How can we rise above and beyond the parochial, provincial, and culturally-dependent views in which each of us has been bred and, to some degree, conditioned? What basic understandings can we use as a foundation for learning and teaching the skills necessary to critically *differentiate* and *discern* in a world of differences? The five suggestions that follow may provide a start.

a. Apply a Scientific Approach



The application of a scientific approach or method has proven to be the most effective problem-solving process yet created by humans.

Therefore it makes sense to apply a scientific approach in our evaluations and judgments about ourselves and our experiences.

This means that we should continually test our assumptions and beliefs; continually gather new facts, data, and observations; revise our beliefs and assumptions as appropriate; and then hold our conclusions and judgments tentatively, in accordance with our own experiences, pending the possibility that new data, new experiences, might necessitate new theories or new assumptions to be tested.

Unstated or hidden assumptions of which we are unaware can often drive our behaviors and attitudes. We need to make a special effort to recognize and become more aware of such assumptions or beliefs.

b. Discern the World “Out There” from the World “In Here”

- Our awareness of 'what goes on' outside of our skin is not the same as 'what goes on.'
- Our ability to experience the world is relative, unique to our own individual sensing capabilities (or sensory acuities), past experiences, and expectations.
- Our environment, the world around us (including ourselves), is ever-changing. We never experience the 'same' person, event, situation, or thing more than once.
- We have limits (due to evolution, genes, physics, etc.) as to what we can experience.

- We can never experience all of what's to experience. We abstract only a portion of what we can sense. We experience incompletely on all levels (macroscopic, microscopic, sub-microscopic, cosmologic, etc.).
- We sense and experience on silent, non-verbal levels, from which we speak, think, infer, etc.

What Happens
≠ What I Sense
≠ How I Respond
≠ "What It Means"

> Is this world real? This is a venerable philosophical issue and I do not wish to be embroiled in the finely honed squabbles to which it has led. I merely state my own working hypothesis: that there is indeed an outside world, and that it is largely independent of our observing it. We can never fully know this outside world, but we can obtain approximate information about some aspects of its properties by using our senses and the operations of our brain. Nor, as we shall see, are we aware of everything that goes on in our brains, but only of some aspects of that activity. Moreover, both these processes—our interpretations of the nature of the outside world and of our own introspections—are open to error.
>
> — Francis Crick (6)

c. Apply Our Knowledge to Our Language Attitudes

- Humans can build on the knowledge of prior generations. Alfred Korzybski referred to this capability as *time-binding*.
- Language serves as the principle tool that facilitates time-binding.
- Language also serves as a determining factor in shaping our world view and influences our experiences.
- We can apply the *map-territory* analogy to our understanding of language: just as a map represents an actual territory, so our language represents our experiences. To the degree that the map accurately portrays the structural relationships of the territory, it serves a valuable purpose. If

the map exaggerates a certain aspect of the territory, or inaccurately depicts a relationship, it can cause trouble. Our verbal 'maps' ought to be congruent and consistent with the realities of our non-verbal 'territories'.

- Current brain scientists agree that what we have naively believed were direct experiences of 'reality' we are instead experiences that we construct within each of our own brains, minds, and nervous systems.
  - Christof Koch: ... *what I see in my head is actually constructed by my head, by my neurons* ... (7)
  - Jeff Hawkins: *Your perception of the world is really a fabrication of your model of the world. You don't really see light or sound. You perceive it because your model says this is how the world is, and those patterns invoke the model.* (8)
  - V.S. Ramachandran: *Our brains are essentially model-making machines.* (9)
  - Francis Crick: *What you see is not what is really there; it is what your brain believes is there... Seeing is an active, constructive process.* (10)
- We ought to easily recognize, then, that ancient notions such as *objective* or *absolute reality* do not accurately reflect the limitations of our nervous systems as they interact with the outside world. Therefore language structures, patterns, or terms that rely on this false-to-fact notion that what I experience (or say) "is" the same as what exists "out there" in the world misrepresent, mislead, and misinform.

> The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group ... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. — Edward Sapir, 1929 (11)

> Our brains are inextricably bound to the cultural milieu they are immersed in. — Dr. V.S. Ramachandran, 2004 (12)

d. Develop Improved Language Habits

No language is perfect. Every language, being man-made and not inherent or inerrant, has structural flaws and cannot properly reflect the structure of the world we uniquely sense and experience. If we accept the view that language(s) shape, influence, affect, etc., how a given culture constructs the 'realities' of that culture's experiences, behavioral norms, world view, etc. (Ramachandran, Sapir, and others), then it behooves us as individuals and societies to acknowledge these flaws and revise our language(s) accordingly.

In addition to these structural flaws, individuals are prone to commit other errors that result from lack of awareness of the abstracting/evaluating process, conventional language habits and usages, or careless inattention. Some of the symptoms of language misbehaviors include:

1. We uncritically accept our perceptions of the world 'out there' as complete, accurate, and "the way it is."
2. We confuse the word itself with what the word stands for.
3. We act as if words have 'meanings' on their own, without respect to individuals and context.
4. We mistake or confuse facts with inferences, assumptions, beliefs, etc.
5. We do not account for "shades of gray," simplistically look for black or white, right or wrong, good or bad.
6. We tend to look for and recognize similarities more than differences, which results in mistaken generalizations, stereotypes, biases, etc.
7. We forget or overlook the fact that every person and every thing changes over time.
8. We use language to verbally 'separate' what cannot be separated in the real world (ex. mind from body, thoughts from feelings, style from content, form from function, etc.).

To overcome these tendencies:

a. Avoid unnecessary or inappropriate to be verb forms, especially those related to the "is of *predication*" (*the movie was bad; he is good-looking; the rose is red; the food was terrific*) and the "is of *identity*" (*he's a liberal; she's a feminist; they are Muslims*).
b. Avoid inappropriate absolutistic terms such as *all, none, best ever, totally, absolutely, no doubt, exactly, exact same,* etc.
c. Recognize shades of gray, not simply black|white, good|bad, either|or.
d. Look for multiple causes for events rather than *the* cause.
e. Use active, operational terms that indicate awareness of "to-me-ness" and don't confuse judgments with descriptions.
f. While you maintain awareness of your own sense of "to-me-ness," recognize other's sense of "to-them-ness".
g. Differentiate facts from inferences, beliefs, and assumptions. Apply a high standard for what you consider to constitute a *fact* and adjust your reactions, behaviors, or attitudes accordingly:
    - *Facts* can only be made after an observation or event. Inferences can be made at any time and can be speculative about the future.
    - *Facts* do not go beyond what is observed. Facts do not speculate regarding intentions, motivations, or causes.
    - *Facts* indicate assurances as close to certainty as possible. Inferences are best expressed in terms of degrees of probability.
h. Recognize that people and things change over time, often in ways that are not visibly apparent.
i. Avoid the "tyranny of categories." Recognize that all labels, categories, classifications, types, etc., result from verbal (abstract) constructions based on similarities. Apply indices to avoid generalizations or stereotypes: Muslim_1 is not Muslim_2; conservative_1 is not conservative_2; rapper_1 is not rapper_2; $\text{government}_{(1\text{-state})}$ is not $\text{government}_{(2\text{-federal})}$.
j. Take responsibility for your own actions; don't say "you" when you should say "I."

k. Take responsibility for your reactions; "I felt hurt," not "she hurt my feelings."
l. Look for differences among generalities to avoid stereotypes. Don't fall for the easy-to-overlook bias and prejudice inherent in such attitudes as: *let's get a woman's perspective; we need to have Hispanic representation on the council; the youth want a seat at the table.* Can *all* women, *all* Hispanics, and *all* youth be presumed to be so similar that their perspectives and views are the same as those of one representatives?
m. Avoid objectifying (or reifying) processes and high-order abstractions: *the weather, the economy, politics, the media, truth, technology, justice,* etc.
n. Avoid perpetuating inappropriate "word magic" or "magical thinking" behaviors such as superstitions, myths, jinxes, etc.

e. Develop New Behaviors and Attitudes

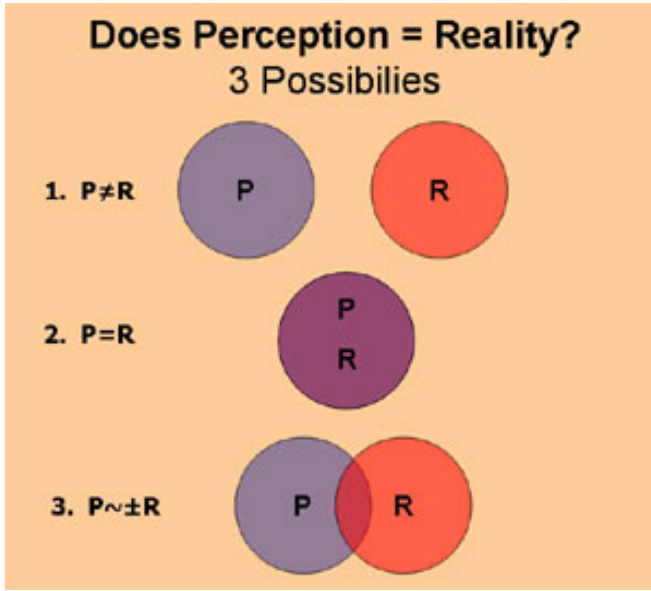
Our language habits can affect our physiological behavior; we can allow what we see, hear, say, etc., to affect our blood pressure, pulse, rate of breathing, etc.

As we become more aware of our verbal and non-verbal behaviors, we can practice techniques to achieve greater degrees of relaxation, less stress, greater sense of our environment, etc.

We have the ability to respond conditionally to non-verbal and symbolic stimuli. In other words, we have some degree of control over our response to a specific stimulus.

When we respond automatically, without exercising control over our response, we allow the stimulus to condition or determine our response. In other words, we behave more like Pavlov's dog than an aware human being when we let someone or something "push our emotional hot buttons."

Is it true that "image is everything" and "perception is reality"?



> After mulling over this idea all weekend, I have come to the conclusion for myself that I believe perception is not reality. While we all glimpse reality, we always view it through a lens that is tinted by our own experiences, beliefs, values, and what angle we perceive from. As we have discussed at other points in time throughout the course of this class, we can never know or see or sense everything; it's impossible. Also, it is impossible for us to not be biased to reality and see it exactly as it is. We are only able to see one angle of reality, and even that one angle is tinted, fragmented, and shaped according to us. Therefore, what we perceive is not reality.
>
> — Anna Ruth Overbey (13)

Our ability to achieve "maximum humanness" and evolve to our human potential is a function of how accurately our language behaviors (what we do) reflect and are consistent with what we know.:

- We ought to maintain an ongoing attitude of "to-me-ness."
- We ought to hold our opinions, judgments, beliefs, and assumptions with a degree of tentativeness and willingness to change if new information or experiences warrant.
- We ought to live comfortably with uncertainty.

- We ought to exercise a healthy degree of skepticism and inquisitiveness.
- We ought to strive for more description and less opinion when it's appropriate.
- We ought to strive for more unique and personal observations in our pronouncements, and fewer cliches, stock phrases, aphorisms, and conventional wisdoms.
- We ought to look for differences among similarities, as well as recognize similarities among differences. We ought to be able to see both the forest and the trees, depending on the circumstances.
- We ought to maintain a deserved sense of humility, and minimize know-it-all attitudes.
- Know what you do. Do what you know.

What is demanded is a change in our imaginative picture of the world — a picture which has been handed down from remote, perhaps pre-human ancestors, and has been learned by each one of us in early childhood. A change in our imagination is always difficult, especially when we are no longer young. The same sort of change was demanded by Copernicus, when he taught that the earth is not stationary and the heavens do not revolve about it once a day. To us now there is no difficulty in this idea, because we learned it before our mental habits had become fixed.

—Bertrand Russell (14)

Eating Menus

This issue of *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* (January 2004) marks another transition in the organizational evolution of a discipline. Published from 1943-1948 by the Society for General Semantics, then from 1949-2003 by the International Society for General Semantics, *ETC* now falls under the stewardship of the Institute of General Semantics.

Twenty-seven years ago, this journal experienced a different type of transition. The late Neil Postman, remembered in the previous issue of *ETC*, began his 10-year editorship of this journal with a clearly articulated point of view in the first of his 'themed' issues, "The Roots of Fanaticism."

He diagnosed that, in 1977, there existed a "state of mind which banishes reason and generates frenzy, [that] has accompanied mankind throughout our history and gives no sign that it is wearying of the journey." He observed that this "state of mind" had produced "the odor of a kind of intellectual decadence that some of us have smelled before."

Postman predicted that "the study of symbolic processes will be a pre-eminent intellectual enterprise for the remainder of this century."

To whatever degree 'we' have, since 1977, engaged in "the study of symbolic processes," it doesn't appear to me that we've succeeded in diluting what Postman sniffed as the "odor of a kind of intellectual decadence." Indeed, I contend that this 'odor' lingers, wafts and seeps even more persistently and pervasively in 2004 than in 1977.

Consider the issues that, on a given day, dominate our national interest as evidenced by newspapers, media talk shows, and the Internet. Many of these current (March 2004) issues

represent deeply-rooted conflicts that concern "symbolic processes" and the "intellectual decadence" of rulers and/or the ruled, who lack the means to differentiate symbols *as symbols*, rather than *things, values,* or *truths.*

- A piece of paper generated by a local government official that symbolizes a societal practice that, in English, we call *marriage* has become a touchstone issue for the 2004 elections, undoubtedly to affect every level of elected office.
- The issuance of the piece of paper that, in English, we call a *marriage certificate* has become the object of a movement to generate another piece of paper that, in English, we refer to as an *amendment,* that will change another piece of paper that we, in English, call *the Constitution of the United States of America.* The intent of this amendment is to define exactly what *marriage* is, and by extension, what it most definitely *is not.*
- The cultural buzz focuses on the recent release of Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of the Christ.* This film presents his (Gibson's) creative interpretation of the Apostles' descriptions of their recollections of the events leading to the crucifixion of Jesus. Much of the buzz deals not with the film as a film, but with Gibson's motivations, with what some perceive as his anti-Semitic point of view, and with the question of "Truth" in his creative depiction—is it indeed "as it was"? (Except for the special effects, of course—I assume no actors actually suffered or were subjected to inhumane treatment during the filming.)
- The French National Assembly has voted to ban clothing and jewelry that constitute "ostensibly" religious symbols from that nation's public schools.
- The ramifications of the "wardrobe malfunction" that revealed part of Janet Jackson's right breast during the Super Bowl halftime continue. Some major media conglomerates have taken actions to curtail or terminate indecent and obscene programming, even prior to governmental direction or market demands.

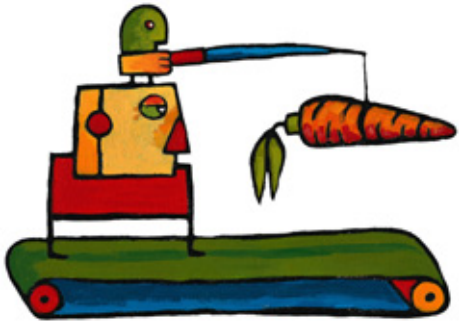
It seems to me, then, that our susceptibility to all things symbol-related, and our vulnerability to those who manipulate the symbols (and labels, words, morals, attitudes, beliefs, etc.) has not ameliorated significantly in the quarter century since Postman's editorial. We still, as individuals, groups, and cultures, exhibit behaviors that amount to "eating the menu," so to speak. We still confuse flags with freedoms, bumper stickers with beliefs, and appearances with 'realities.'

So what, then, about the relevance of general semantics? Does our discipline bring anything to the table of "intellectual enterprise" for this 21st century? You may correctly presume that I, as the new Executive Director of this 'new' organization, would answer in the affirmative.

Twenty-seven years ago, Neil Postman wrote about the consequences of the "symbolic stench" (my term) that pollutes what passes for contemporary cultural, political, and social discourse. Alfred Korzybski warned us over seventy years ago that "who rules the symbols rules us." The current 'issues' that exist on verbal and symbolic levels will divide us politically in this election year, even as our living existence is threatened on quite visible non-verbal levels in New York, Baghdad, Madrid and other cities inevitably to be named later.

Our challenge as students, practitioners, publishers and advocates of an extensional, scientific orientation is to forthrightly address the threats to sane, time-binding behavior as we can, using the methods and tools at our disposal.

Otherwise, we will continue to be fed menus, and eventually not object to the taste.



Calling Out the Symbol Rulers

Nothing illustrates the power of symbols and language quite like a presidential election. Of course, those of us who know a little bit of general semantics recognize that this 'power' lies not in the words and symbols themselves, but in the motivations, intentions, reactions, and evaluations of the individual human beings who speak, write, see, hear, and read the words and symbols.

Alfred Korzybski emphasized that we must vigilantly maintain an ongoing awareness that *symbols* (or "maps") are *not* the things symbolized (or "territories"). He underscored the potential consequences of confusing symbols with their referents when he cautioned that, "Those who rule the symbols, rule us." (1)

Who rules *your* symbols?

With this issue we introduce a new regular feature, "Calling Out the Symbol Rulers." Each quarter we will highlight examples of how rulers rule by symbols, and how we let ourselves be ruled by symbols. This feature will succeed to the degree that you and other readers participate in the process by corresponding with us — we seek your responses, reactions, analyses, opinions, and examples you find pertinent to this topic.

Whom might we classify as potential symbol rulers? By our definition, just about anybody who participates in a communicative transaction could be considered a symbol ruler. We might start by carefully observing people of influence such as politicians, bureaucrats, teachers, bosses, parents, supervisors, coaches, advertisers, priests, preachers, rabbis, mullahs, commentators, columnists, reporters, etc. How do they generate, manipulate, frame, and convey their messages? What techniques do they employ to influence our judgments and decisions?

You might apply some of the principles of general semantics in your analyses:

- Do they confuse *facts* with inferences, judgments, or beliefs? (And by what standard are *facts* differentiated from *non-facts*?)
- Do they over-simplify complex issues into easy-to-understand but misleading *either-or, black-or-white, right-or-wrong* polarized choices?
- Do they attempt to attribute only one cause to an event or one consequence of an action, rather than recognizing multiple causes and multiple consequences — some of which we may never know?
- Do they generalize from one experience or one person's anecdotal evidence as if that were the only possible or the 'right' universal experience?
- Do they take responsibility for their own statements and judgments, recognizing what Wendell Johnson referred to as "to-me-ness," or do they attempt to speak for a group or with the authority of a group?
- To what degree are they saying something beyond the simple application of a label? ("All you need to know about him is that *he's a liberal!*")
- Do they objectify high order abstractions such as *truth, justice, moral values, security* and speak about 'them' as if 'they' were 'things,' rather than inherently inexact, personalized, and even arbitrary notions?
- Do they concentrate on similarities at the expense of ignoring differences, and vice-versa? Do they exhibit attitudes of *allness* (or *none-ness*)?
- Do they fail to apply Korzybski's *extensional devices* — specifically, *indexing* (Muslim Leader$_1$ is not Muslim Leader$_2$), *dating* (Senator Phlops views on de-regulation$_{1980}$ may not represent the Senator's views$_{2005}$), and *et cetera*, (the et cetera, or etc., means that more can always be said; we can never know *all* there is to know about *anything*).

Remember ... these same principles that you apply critically to others, you can apply to yourself. And we want to emphasize that in general semantics we are not so concerned with the *words* as we are with the underlying human thinking-feeling and evaluating processes, judgments, perspectives, etc., that are conveyed by the words.

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country.
Edward Bernays (1928)

The affairs of man are conducted by our own, man-made rules and according to man-made theories. Man's achievements rest upon the use of symbols. For this reason, we must consider ourselves as a symbolic, semantic class of life, and those who rule the symbols, rule us.
Alfred Korzybski (1933)

Words by Other Names

Words have been in the news a lot lately.

Of course, one could make the argument that what we call *the news* is nothing but words. We hear and read about *the news* in the words that are handed to us by others.

Even when we view wordless videos of tsunami waves rushing through village streets and hear desperate screams for help, those sights and sounds have been presented to us in a verbal context.

Then, having heard, read and seen *the news*, we think about *the news* and talk about *the news* and argue about *the news* using these same words.

I confess that I don't see anything particularly interesting or significant about studying words. There's a lot of wisdom in the "rose by any other name would smell as sweet" thing. Whether you use this word or that word, changing the word doesn't change whatever it is that the word is referring to.

However, when people act differently when one word is substituted for another; when their attitudes change upon hearing a report phrased in certain language; when a message can be intentionally framed to manipulate how people will respond to it—now that I find not only interesting but crucially important.

Locally, the word *meteorologist* has been in the news. Should someone who reports the weather be allowed to refer to herself as a *meteorologist* if she doesn't have a meteorology degree? Whether she's called a *weather reporter,* a *forecaster,* a *meteorologist* or a *senior staff meteorologist*, is the title going to change her forecast?

I would argue that the job title doesn't materially affect the work itself. What matters is how the viewing public reacts to the words. If Channel X promotes so-and-so as a *weather forecaster*

and Channel Y promotes you-know-who as *senior staff meteorologist whose forecast has the seal of approval of …*, you can probably guess the results.

It's possible that a person with a doctorate in meteorology will consistently make more accurate forecasts than an attractive English major who wants to become an "on-air personality." It's also possible that a mere *forecaster* with 30 years of experience might prove more reliable than a young degreed *meteorologist* who graduated *magna cumulus laude*.

Is it the quality of the work that matters or the words in the credentials?

Nationally, our political landscape is littered with verbal land mines.

The war in Iraq has popularized the phrase *the situation on the ground.* We hear reports from foreign correspondents that refer to *the situation on the ground.* Is there some situation in the war that matters other than *the situation on the ground* ?

I believe that this phrase has emerged because it's a politically correct euphemism used to distinguish what's actually happening from what political leaders want us to believe. On the one hand, we have the language coming out of Washington about what's going on in Iraq; on the other hand, there's *the situation on the ground.*

In the Social Security debate, we have the phrase *personal accounts* pitted against *privatization.* We have conservatives changing the terms of the environmental debate from *global warming* to *global climate change*. (It's too bad we don't have a properly credentialed *meteorologist* handy to settle which phrase is meteorologically correct.)

Last fall, then-Secretary of State Colin Powell made news around the world when he used *genocide* in relation to *the situation on the ground* in Darfur, Sudan.

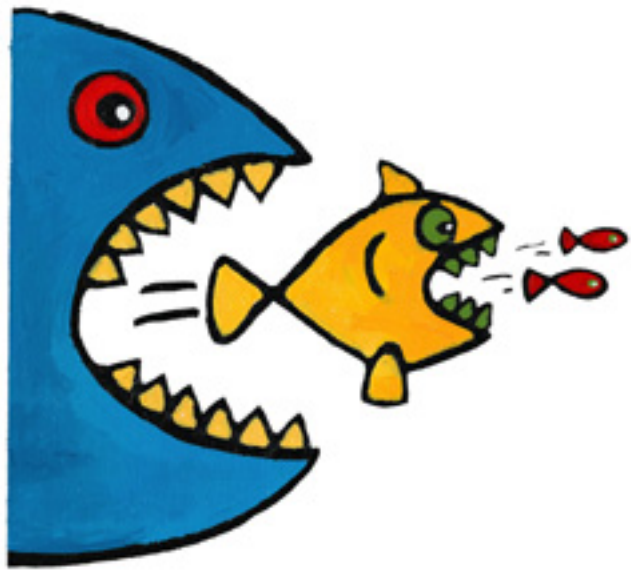
The appropriateness of the word *genocide* was debated as a factor in how nations around the world should respond. So far as I can determine, nobody disputes the assertion that government-backed janjaweed militias are committing atrocities against the people of western Sudan. But it seems as though the international

response is conditioned by a word: If it's *genocide*, we do X; if it's *not genocide*, we can get by with just Y.

More than 70 years ago, the author of a book titled *Science and Sanity* forecasted that "those who rule the symbols rule us."

We are confronted every day by those who seek to "rule" our thoughts, attitudes and behaviors. From frivolous advertising to ratings-driven television to global propaganda, we are bombarded by persuasive words, images and symbols.

The challenge as I see it is: *Who rules your symbols?*



We are suspended in language in such a way that we cannot say what is up and what is down. The word 'reality' is also a word, a word which we must learn to use correctly.

Niels Bohr

Response Side Semantics

From the July 1, 2005, National Public Radio broadcast of the *Diane Rehm Show*:

> Diane: Here is an interesting email from Steve, who's the Executive Director for the Institute of General Semantics. He says: "These kinds of panels invariably concentrate on the supply side of political talk — the spin, the propaganda, the doublespeak. Seldom does anybody bring up the listener's or reader's individual responsibility to critically, sometimes skeptically, evaluate the messages they hear and read. Why isn't there more emphasis on educating people as critical thinkers and evaluators?" (1)

The distinguished panel that prompted my question consisted of: Deborah Tannen, Professor of Linguistics at Georgetown University (2), William D. Lutz, Professor of English at Rutgers University (3), and Washington Post reporter Mark Leibovich. The topic for this program concerned "Political Language." Responding to my question, Leibovich commented:

> I think that's a fantastic point. I mean, I think it's one thing to talk about responsibility, it's another thing to talk about ability. Quite frankly, you really, really need to think and listen hard to actually see and recognize a lot of the rhetoric that is coming your way. (1)

Lutz responded that he dealt with the question in the last chapter of his *Doublespeak Defined* book. The discussion moved on.

Is the premise of my question valid, that virtually all the focus is on the "supply side" of the communication process, implying that the reaction or response to the message is inevitable, predetermined, or presumed?

Consider:

- How many hundreds of colleges have programs in advertising and public relations? How many colleges have even one course that deals with how to intelligently evaluate and respond to advertising?
- How many billions of dollars are spent around the world on campaigns to stimulate demand, desire, and support for products, services, political agendas, and religious causes? How many dollars are spent to inform and educate individuals as to the manipulative means used by media advertisers, politicians on the stump, and preachers in the pulpit?
- It's not uncommon to hear a remorseful person caught in the media's crosshairs issue an apology such as, "I apologize to anyone who might have been offended by what I said." How often does anyone challenge those who choose to take offense? Why is the burden on the speaker to *not* say something that *might* offend, rather than on the listeners who seem to seek opportunities to find offense?
- Do we spend more time teaching children about "bad" words, images, and thoughts that should not be used, or do we teach them how they might react if they encounter such "bad" things?
- Could there exist a more glaring prejudice against the notion of responsibly reacting and responding than the linguistic lunacy that underlies the pervasive term *proactive*? By what tortured logic should the act of *reacting* be de-legitimatized in favor of the false-to-fact folly that someone can *be proactive,* without benefit of any stimulus, prompt, or need? (As a public service, I offer the beginning of an indefinitely long list of topics about which it is now impossible to *be proactive:* terrorism, airport security, drugs, gangs, the budget deficit, the environment, urban sprawl, inflation, and — no offense — your

weight. I'm sorry, but those and all other known issues are already out there, and it's too late for anybody to *be proactive* about them.) (4)

In the early 1960s, Ernest Hemingway opined that the essential attribute of a great writer was to "have a built-in, shockproof crap detector." (5)

In 1933, Alfred Korzybski warned that "those who rule the symbols, rule us." (6)

As 2005 turns to 2006, I suggest that the burden for detecting crap now falls squarely on those who must continually respond to the accelerating and accumulating supply of crap generated by the growing hordes of symbol-ruling-wannabes.

Therefore I propose to introduce a new term to the general semantics lexicon that acknowledges the much-neglected response side of the communication relationship: *Response Side Semantics.*

A Metaphor Inspired by Economics and Behavioral Science

During the 1980 U.S. Presidential election campaign, Ronald Reagan promoted the economic theories of Arthur B. Laffer, an economics professor at the University of Chicago. Laffer's theory regarding taxation maintained that an economy required an optimal rate of taxation to generate the maximum revenue. Beyond that optimal rate, revenue actually decreased, which meant that, on the back side of the curve, tax rate decreases actually resulted in increased tax revenue. (7) In the political campaign language of 1980, the policy was referred to as "supply side economics."

Laffer predicted that as tax rates were lowered (presuming, of course, that the current rate was beyond the optimal rate for maximum revenue), producers and manufacturers would apply their tax savings to produce and manufacture more goods and services, increasing the overall supply of goods and services. As the available level of supplies went up, prices would go down, consumers would buy and demand more, and the general economy would expand such that the same (or ever lower) tax rate

would produce more actual revenue dollars. The rising tide of revenue would lift all economic boats. Supply rested on one side of the relationship, demand on the other; demand was a function of supply.

Supply ⇨ Demand

or

Demand = f(Supply)

The supply side is like a dog, and the demand side is like the dog's tail. Manipulating the supply controls the demand. The dog wags the tail.

Ivan Pavlov, the 19th-century Russian professor of chemistry and physiology, had a real dog. Pavlov's dog became famous not for wagging its tail, but for salivating. Pavlov conducted experiments with the dog that illustrated he could train (or condition) the dog to salivate at the sound of a bell when the bell was substituted for actual food. Inducing a response (saliva) by manipulating the stimulus (food, then bell) illustrates the physiological action known as a *conditioned reflex,* or in behavioral studies, a *conditioned response.*

The response can be controlled by manipulating the stimulus, therefore the response can be expressed as a function of the stimulus.

Stimulus ⇨ Response

or

Response = f(Stimulus)

Now we have two sets of metaphors, each representing a function in which the manipulation of the left side of the relationship results in a (to some degree) predictable change on the right side of the relationship:

from Economics:

Supply Side ⟹ Demand

from Behavioral Science:

Stimulus ⟹ Response

Combining the two, I've created a third metaphor to suit my purpose:

Supply Side ⟹ Response Side

The "Response Side" in General Semantics

Alfred Korzybski offered a general theory of human behavior that focuses on matters of evaluation. Korzybski used the term *evaluation* in a much broader sense than we normally use it today. He considered *evaluation* to include the *total* response (physiological, neurological, psychological, linguistic, etc.) of an individual to a given event in a specific environment, to include the individual's awareness of the response. He considered the domain of his studies to include all fields related to how humans sense, experience, and perceive what goes on in their environments (including what he termed their *neurolinguistic* and *neurosemantic* environments), and how they *evaluate* those goings-on in terms of their subsequent significance, 'meanings,' and consequences.

Coincidentally, Korzybski also used a dog ("FIDO") to illustrate two important differences between humans and animals: 1) Humans have an almost limitless capacity to manipulate symbols, to make one symbol 'stand for' many things, or to have many symbols 'stand for' the same thing; and 2) Humans have a greater potential capability to temper their susceptibility to the conditioned response. In other word, we have the potential capability to respond *conditionally* to symbol stimulation.

Indeed, the late Ken Johnson recognized this as the core of general semantics when asked the question, "How would you describe general semantics in one word?" His answer: *Conditionality.* (8)

Clearly, general semantics already encompasses both sides of the Supply Side — Response Side relationship.

However, in my judgment, far too much well-intentioned attention has been placed on the supply side, or stimulus side, or sender side, of general semantics. We have extolled the benefits of general semantics as applied to "effective communication" (which translates primarily to writing and speaking) and "talking sense" with more clarity, precision, and less likelihood of being misunderstood. But our speaking, writing, and thinking-feeling depend first on our *evaluations* of our experiences. Just as Wendell Johnson said that we "can't write writing" (9) (i.e., we must write about something), we do not speak or write unless prompted in some way as a reaction or response to some stimulus, need, prompt, or 'thing.' What we humans do, in the most general sense, is *respond* to our non-verbal and verbal *evaluations.*

Korzybski's focus on *evaluation* (or the *response side*) has not received the emphasis that it deserves in differentiating general semantics from other disciplines like linguistics, philosophy, psychology, etc. I propose, therefore, that it's time to acknowledge and emphasize the response side of general semantics, or *Response Side Semantics* — especially in light of two clear and present threats coming from the supply side.

Threat 1: Supply Side Saturation — Advertising

That we in 21st-century America approach a saturation point in terms of "semantic supply" is, I would argue, inarguable. Milton Dawes notes the millions of instances of "cultural conditioning" to which we're exposed throughout our lives. (10) Gregg Hoffmann refers to the pervasive influence of the "mediated world" that surrounds us and unavoidably influences our thinking, attitudes and behaviors. He points out that most of us will be confronted by an

onslaught of "mediated messages" within the first hour or two of waking up in the morning ... the alarm clock radio, the newspaper, TV, talk radio in the car, billboards, ads plastered on every conceivable surface, the Internet, email, written reports, etc. (11)

Many of these mediated messages attempt to persuade us — some might say condition us — to think, feel, behave, and act according to the specific wishes of the suppliers of the messages. *Do this, don't do that, stay tuned, vote for me, rent this space, check our website, don't touch that dial, act now, repent now, buy now.*

In the excellent PBS *Frontline* documentary "The Persuaders," Mark Crispin Miller of New York University notes the growing level of advertising "clutter" in our environment. The fundamental challenge of advertisers is to break through this ever-increasing clutter, yet each attempt to break through the clutter, adds more clutter. He warns that we're on the verge of becoming acclimated to the pervasive effects of all this advertising clutter: "Once a culture becomes entirely advertising-friendly, it ceases to be a culture at all." (12)

The late Robert P. Pula, former IGS Director, author, and teacher, defined culture as a "shared hallucination." In this context, we might wonder who's supplying the hallucinogens that define our current culture.

Does Miller's warning overstate the threat that advertising may overwhelm our individual and collective abilities to appropriately evaluate and respond — or *not* respond?

Consider the declared objectives of the advertising gurus themselves:

> **Douglas Atkin**, Merkley and Partners Advertising: "When I was a brand manager at Proctor & Gamble, my job was basically to make sure the product was good, develop new advertising copy, design the pack. Now a brand manager has an entirely different kind of responsibility. In fact, they have more responsibility. Their job now is to create and maintain a whole meaning system for people, through which they get identity and understanding of the world. Their job now is to

be a community leader." Atkin observed the cult-like devotion of some consumers to their brands, such as Saturn automobile owners, Nike shoe wearers, and Apple Macintosh computer users. His quest then became to "find out why people join cults and apply that knowledge to brands." (12)

Kevin Roberts, CEO, Saatchi & Saatchi, Inc.: "You feel the world through your senses, the five senses, and that's what's next. The brands that can move to that emotional level, that can create *loyalty beyond reason*, are going to be the brands where premium profits lie." (12)

Clotaire Rapaille, French "Marketing Guru" who claims 50 of the Fortune 100 companies as clients and was trained as a psychiatrist who treated autistic children. He discusses his approach to marketing research and how he applies the results to advertising: "We start with the cortex because people want to show how intelligent they are. So give them a chance. We don't care what they say ... It's absolutely crucial to understand what I call 'the reptilian hot button.' My theory is very simple. The reptilian [brain] always win. I don't care what you're going to tell me intellectually, give me the reptilian." (12)

These three industry leaders, who influence the supply of millions of dollars of targeted advertising messages every year, have proudly and unapologetically announced their intentions to:

- Create a "meaning system" for consumers by learning what cults do, then applying similar techniques to develop cult-like responses to their clients' products and brands.
- Generate "loyalty beyond reason" among their clients' consumers.
- Appeal directly to the 'emotional' or reptilian brain "hot buttons" of their client's consumers, bypassing altogether their intellectual reasoning capabilities.

So ... what's in *your* hot button?

Now, I am not so naïve as to presume that these objectives are something new in the world of advertising. However, to hear this in such blatant, matter-of-fact terms in the presence of such overwhelming evidence that advertisers are already well on their way to successfully achieving these objectives, causes me concern.

And it apparently concerns Douglas Rushkoff, the co-writer and correspondent of "The Persuaders." He asks the $64,000 question to Rapaille, echoing the sentiments I posed to Diane Rehm's panel:

> "What about the environment? If the lizard [reptilian brain] wants the Hummer, and the lizard's not going to listen to the environmentalist then isn't it our job, as aware people, to get the reptile to shut up and appeal to the cortex, to appeal to the mammal?" (12)

Right on, Brother Rushkoff!

But ... whose job is it, anyway? Who volunteers to appeal to the mammalian cortex, to go toe-to-toe (or synapse-to-synapse) against the billions of dollars spent worldwide to supply our reptilian brains with delicious morsels of loyalty, devoid of any nutritional reason?

Is there any market for an antidote to advertising?

Threat #2: Supply Side Pollution — Politics

In the political arena of persuasion, Rushkoff's documentary features the work of Frank Luntz, the consultant who constructed much of the language that has been so effectively used (progressives might say "abused") by conservative politicians since the early 1990s.

Nicholas Lemann profiled Luntz in 2000 for *The New Yorker* in an article titled, "The Word Lab." (13) Luntz worked with House Republicans in 1994 and is generally credited as the verbal craftsman for the "Contract with America" that swept the Republicans to victory in the 1994 mid-term elections.

Lemann describes the process Luntz uses to supply the words and phrases that work to get the desired response from voters. He notes that the purpose of Luntz's "word lab" is not necessarily to find the most informative, accurate, or clarifying terms, but to research which terms most often result in the aims of the client — usually, election, or approval. Therefore, the point of Luntz's work, according to Lemann, is "to find out what voters already think and then design rhetoric to persuade them that politicians agree with it." (13)

Lemann credits Luntz with advising "his clients to say *Department of Defense* instead of *Pentagon, opportunity scholarships* instead of *vouchers, tax relief* instead of *tax cuts*, and *climate change* instead of *global warming*." (13)

In "The Persuaders," Luntz allows Rushkoff's crew to film one of his research focus groups for a Florida utility company that wants to "build public support for a change in how it's regulated on the environment." (12)

Luntz describes his challenge:

> I know that the public is very down on corporate America in general and they're down on power companies. So what is the language, what is the information, what are the facts, what are the figures that would get Americans to say, "You know what? My electricity company, it's OK." (12)

However, based on what we observe in the documentary, the focus group isn't presented with "information, facts, or figures" intended to educate. Instead, they're subjected to language prepared by the utility company that promotes its scripted objectives. Through one-way glass, Luntz watches the subjects react and measures their responses on an electronic recorder. He looks for the language that most noticeably evokes the desired response from the subjects.

He (Luntz, not Pavlov) knows it when he sees his subjects (not his dog) react to it (*sans* saliva). "If the language works, the language works." (12)

What's his secret? What is Luntz paying attention to that others are missing? He states:

> 80 percent of our life is emotion and only 20 percent is intellect. I am much more interested in how you feel than how you think. How you think is on the outside, how you feel is on the inside, so that's what I need to understand. (12)

One of Luntz's most notable successes was to gain popular support to repeal what has been known historically as the *estate tax.*

Here's a brief description from the IRS website, which still refers to "the Estate Tax":

> Presently ... only total taxable estates and lifetime gifts that exceed $1,000,000 will actually have to pay tax. In its current form, the estate tax only affects the wealthiest 2% of all Americans. (14)

Now, if you're outraged that this tax is on the books, let me hear you yell "This is an outrage! Pishahhh!"

I didn't think so.

But Luntz came up with a simple approach to rally the masses against a tax that only applies to the wealthiest 2% of Americans. According to Lemann, Luntz first asked a focus group "what they most want to eliminate: an estate tax, an inheritance tax, or a death tax." The death tax came out first because the perception was that the government should not tax your family after you die. Then he asked them to guess how much money could be passed down before the "death tax" kicked in. Except for the accountants who knew the answer, everyone else in the focus group guessed way too low. Even with the subsequent information that you had to leave an estate valued at a minimum of $675,000 (the figure in 2000, subsequently raised to $1,000,000) before your heirs were subject to "death tax" consequences, the majority of the focus group still supported its repeal. And today, according to Luntz,

75% of Americans support permanent repeal of the "death tax." (12)

Yes, world ... we are indeed *that* stupid.

In "The Persuaders," Luntz defends his semantic gymnastics on behalf of the *death* tax:

> Look, for years, political people and lawyers — who, by the way are the worst communicators — used the phrase *estate tax.* And for years, they couldn't eliminate it. The public wouldn't support it because the word *estate* sounds wealthy. Someone like me comes around and realizes that it's not an *estate* tax, it's a *death* tax because you're taxed at death. And suddenly, something that isn't viable achieves the support of 75 percent of the American people. It's the same tax, but nobody really knows what an estate is, but they certainly know what it means to be taxed when you die. I'd argue that is a clarification, it's not an obfuscation. (12)

Challenged, Luntz continues:

> I don't argue with you that words can sometimes be used to confuse, but it's up to the practitioners of the study of language to apply them for good and not for evil. It is just like fire. Fire can heat your house or burn it down. (12)

Is it just me, or is it getting uncomfortably warm in here? Is that smoke I smell?

Just like his advertising and marketing counterparts, Luntz makes no secret that he's not out to inform or educate or appeal in any way to rationally-thinking mammalian brains. Like Rapaille, Luntz is after the lizard. And like Rapaille, he's found it.

The success of Frank Luntz and his Republican benefactors has not gone unnoticed. As Matt Bai describes in *The New York Times Magazine*, some Democrats, including House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, think they've found their own progressive version of a semantic alchemist in George Lakoff. (15) Lakoff, linguistics professor at the University of California-Berkeley,

supplied the metaphor of *frames* and pitched it into the cauldron of political constructions.

Bai credits the Democrats embrace of *framing* as the key equalizer in their "victory" (some might say "standoff compromise") earlier this year in defending the Senate filibuster. He describes the approach taken by Democratic pollster Geoff Garin:

> Geoff Garin conducted a confidential poll on judicial nominations, paid for by a coalition of liberal advocacy groups. He was looking for a story — a frame — for the filibuster that would persuade voters that it should be preserved, and he tested four possible narratives. Democratic politicians assumed that voters saw the filibuster fight primarily as a campaign to stop radically conservative judges, as they themselves did. But to their surprise, Garin found that making the case on ideological grounds — that is, that the filibuster prevented the appointment of judges who would roll back civil rights — was the least effective approach. When, however, you told voters that the filibuster had been around for over 200 years, that Republicans were "changing rules in the middle of the game" and dismantling the "checks and balances" that protected us against one-party rule, almost half the voters strongly agreed, and 7 out of 10 were basically persuaded. It became, for them, an issue of fairness.
>
> Garin then convened focus groups and listened for clues about how to make this case. He heard voters call the majority party "arrogant." They said they feared "abuse of power." This phrase struck Garin. He realized many people had already developed deep suspicions about Republicans in Washington. Garin shared his polling with a group of Democratic senators that included Harry Reid, the minority leader. Reid, in turn, assigned Stephanie Cutter, who was Kerry's spokeswoman last year, to put together a campaign-style "war room" on the filibuster. Cutter set up a strategy group, which included senior Senate aides, Garin, the pollster Mark Mellman and Jim Margolis, one of the party's top ad makers. She used

> Garin's research to create a series of talking points intended to cast the filibuster as an American birthright every bit as central to the Republic as Fourth of July fireworks. The talking points began like this: "Republicans are waging an unprecedented power grab. They are changing the rules in the middle of the game and attacking our historic system of checks and balances." They concluded, "Democrats are committed to fighting this abuse of power." (15)

Displaying unusual solidarity, the Democrats kept driving home the "abuse of power" frame and eventually succeeded in forcing a compromise with seven Republicans that 'saved' the filibuster as a procedural option available (as of this writing) to the minority party Senators.

So, what's in a *frame* ? According to Bai:

> Exactly what it means to *frame* issues seems to depend on which Democrat you are talking to, but everyone agrees that it has to do with choosing the language to define a debate and, more important, with fitting individual issues into the contexts of broader story lines. In the months after the election, Democratic consultants and elected officials came to sound like creative-writing teachers, holding forth on the importance of metaphor and narrative.
> (15)

From the promotional blurb for Lakoff's book, *Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate:*

> Author George Lakoff explains how conservatives think, and how to counter their arguments. He outlines in detail the traditional American values that progressives hold, but are often unable to articulate. Lakoff also breaks down the ways in which conservatives have framed the issues, and provides examples of how progressives can reframe them. (16)

So welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to the Great American 'Debate,' 2005style:

In this corner we have the Republican proxy Frank Luntz, armed with the jabs and punches practiced in his word lab.

And in this corner here's George Lakoff, the Democratic "Great Linguistic Hope," who's learned his clinching and counter-punching technique in the basement of his framing franchise.

And all over the arena we have wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling advertising specifically designed (or *devised?*) by Rapaille, Roberts, and Atkin that gives our lizard brains a meaning system for loyally buying everything that the most effective lizard-pleasing persuaders can offer.

Let's get rrrready to ... what, exactly?

A Response to the Threats — Response Side Semantics

We live in two worlds, the verbal world and the non-verbal world. Wendell Johnson wrote, "The worlds we manage to get inside our heads are mostly worlds of words." (17) Our daily challenge is to appropriately integrate these two different worlds in our evaluations, responses, attitudes, behaviors, actions, decisions, etc.

As the "supply" of words, images, and symbols exponentially grows, our individual and collective abilities to adequately evaluate and respond (or *not* respond) to the narrowly-interested symbolic stimulants targeted against us must also rise commensurately, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

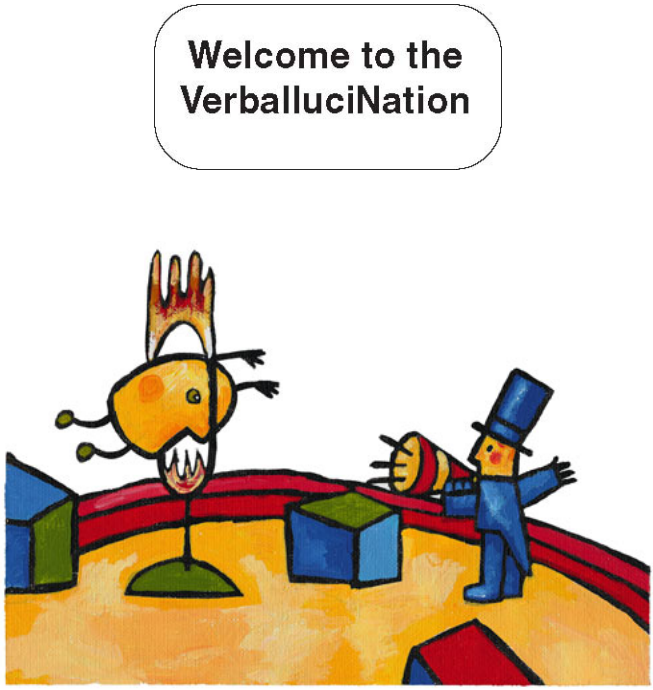
Otherwise, we risk lapsing into a state I call *verballucination*, defined as "a delusional state of uncritical unawareness in which individuals and groups can no longer discriminate words and symbols in any coherent way." We are not 'brainwashed' so much as we are 'mind-muddied.' When we're in this state we are especially vulnerable to appeals for "loyalty beyond reason," to blindly accept the symbols offered by our rulers, to buy into the "meaning systems" sold by the suppliers.

I introduce this notion of *response side semantics* as simply a label that might help us more readily acknowledge the threats to

our individual and collective sanities. We cannot simply acquiesce allegiance and responsibility for our actions, decisions, votes, and purchases to the lizard-loving manipulators on the supply side. Action must follow awareness.

And action, in this case, cannot be laying claim to another corner ring and creating another paradigm for semantic pugilism. We need to educate individuals and groups that we have the mammalian means to detect the crap, to resist the cult-like advertising indoctrination, to subvert our loyalties to our reasoning. We've known how to do it since 1933 when Korzybski's *Science and Sanity* came out.

It's time for us to clean up, not clutter up, our neuro-semantic and neurolinguistic arenas. Otherwise, we might as well go ahead and get the signs made up to post at every port of entry:



Semantic Pollution Fouling the Airwaves

One of the overlooked and under-reported aspects related to drilling in the Barnett Shale is the negative impact to our local linguistic environment.

We're not talking particulate matter here. This is the worrisome increase in measurable *propagandulate* in the lower levels of what is technically referred to as the *purchased mediasphere*.

This semantic pollution poses immediate and long-term threats to the sustainability of what Stephen Colbert calls *truthiness.*

I'm talking about Chesapeake Energy's full-frontal, body-slamming, leg-whipping, arm-twisting, head-butting propaganda blitz on behalf of the Barnett Shale.

As a 54-year-old part-time adjunct who doesn't have anything better to do than think about these things, I'm not sure I will survive the "Summer of the Shale Sale."

I noticed the first mildly annoying effects in the dying days of spring.

"Let's get behind the Barnett," intoned the serious and weathered countenance of Tommy Lee Jones. What do you mean, get *behind* something that's 6,000 feet underground?

Then there was the release of *Citizens of the Shale*, a 30-minute "investigative news report" paid for by … Chesapeake Energy. What? An "investigative news report" paid for by a principal of the "investigation"?

In the introduction, Chesapeake CEO and Chairman Aubrey McClendon said it included "all perspectives … accurate information and fair, fact-based journalism … facts in an in-depthh format … honest and balanced picture."

I trotted out my semantic analyzing kit and measured dangerously low levels of overall *truthiness* based on three samples:

1. The genial "reporter" in the piece, Ginny Simone, isn't a reporter in the journalistic sense. She's employed by the Mercury Group, "proven practitioners of persuasive arts and science that achieve measurable results." (www.mercgroup.com)
2. My personal scientific analysis (I timed and counted) yielded startling results. In the 28-and-a-half-minute broadcast, someone is speaking for 26 minutes. Of 37 identified speakers, 33 speak favorably, two express specific concerns about urban drilling, two are opposed. The 33 proponents get 25 minutes, the other four get the other 60 seconds.
3. There appears a calculated effort to say, either directly or through surrogates, that natural gas is clean and doesn't pollute, and that developing these reserves is a patriotic duty that will "make us less dependent on foreign gas." According to the emissions tables at www.naturalgas.org and www.cleanskies.org, natural gas emits 71 percent as much carbon dioxide (CO2) as oil and 56 percent as much as coal. It actually emits 21 percent more carbon monoxide (CO) than oil, but only about one-fifth as much as coal.

So you can truthfully say natural gas is *cleaner* and *less polluting*, but you can't honestly say that it's *clean* and *doesn't pollute.*

The U.S. certainly relies on imported oil, but we both import and export natural gas, according to the Energy Information Administration. One type of energy commodity shouldn't be confused with another. But there's more.

On Aug. 1, KXAS-TV aired the hour-long production, *Unconventional: The Story of the Barnett Shale*, in prime time, a special program "presented in partnership with Trinity Films brought to you commercial-free by Chesapeake Energy."

A few weeks ago, Chesapeake hired Tracy Rowlett, a former TV journalist, and a slew of other former news producers and reporters.

There's an upcoming 16-page children's coloring/activity book featuring "Chesapeake Charlie — a friendly beagle who knows a lot about natural gas production and its many benefits."

There are similar, some even larger, U.S. shale deposits elsewhere, which led me to Washington, D.C., home to the American Clean Skies Foundation, a nonprofit organization that hosts www.cleanskies.org, as well as an Internet broadcasting channel, www.cleanskies.tv.

This venture was announced as a "multi-million dollar media advocacy campaign to promote cleaner energy sources that includes a website, a national magazine, and a major print and television ad campaign." The founder and funder? Aubrey McClendon.

I have no financial interest in the Barnett Shale although last December, in my previous job as executive director for a nonprofit organization, I signed a lease with Fort Worth Energy for a property owned by the organization.

I am not opposed to urban drilling. It only makes sense to exploit the natural resources we have. But it only makes sense conditionally, with proper planning, oversight and transparency throughout the entire process involving citizens, elected officials and industry.

I can understand Chesapeake wanting to get ahead of the public relations curve but this slick and ceaseless machine is over the top. And with all this *Chesa-speak*, why are its "competitors" — XTO, Devon, etc. — so silent?

Those are questions I can't answer. You may have questions you can't answer either.

Let's ask Rowlett, the name we can trust. He starts his new gig for Chesapeake next month on www.shale.tv. He and his team of former journalists are probably going to be looking for story leads, so why don't we send him our questions?

E-mail your questions to me. I'll make sure they get sent to him and follow up with his responses.

UPDATES:

1. According to *The New York Times*, "On Friday, Aubrey K. McClendon, the chief executive of Chesapeake Energy, issued a statement saying he had been forced to sell all of his 33.5 million shares in Chesapeake because of a margin call." October 12, 2008 www.nytimes.com/2008/10/13/business/13margin.html?em
2. On October 13, 2008, *The Dallas Morning News* reported: "The company laid off 10 employees, including former KTVT (Channel 11) news anchor Tracy Rowlett. Chesapeake had expected to go national with the novel site, called Shale.TV."

For more about Chesapeake Energy's propaganda campaign, read "Lay Off of My PERSUADE Shoes" in **SUPPLEMENTARIES**.

It has been found possible to mold the mind of the masses so that they will throw their newly gained strength in the desired direction. In the present structure of society, this practice is inevitable. Whatever of social importance is done today, whether in politics, finance, manufacture, agriculture, charity, education, or other fields, must be done with the help of propaganda. Propaganda is the executive arm of the invisible government.

Edward L.Bernays

How Do You Play the Game?

I grew up playing sports in the Texas Panhandle. On my bedroom wall, I had a plaque inscribed with a then-famous Grantland Rice saying: “For when the one great scorer comes to write against your name, he marks — not that you won or lost — but how you played the game.”

I’d like to think I took that value to heart.

In 1972, my ability to throw a football, and a decent SAT score, earned me an appointment to the Air Force Academy. On the field, “how I played the game” warranted only a two-year intercollegiate career.

Off the field, I persevered to graduate. I attribute that in large part to my early-ingrained respect for how I (in the broader sense) “played the game.”

At the Air Force Academy, how you were supposed to play the game was codified in the cadet honor code: “We will not lie, steal, or cheat, nor tolerate among us anyone who does.”

Those first three will-nots were straightforward enough. The sticky wicket was that toleration thing, which meant that if we knew of an honor violation, we were bound by the code to report it.

If we didn’t report it — if we tolerated a violation — we could be judged as guilty as the deed-doer, and expelled just as quickly.

What’s up with that?

I recollect the rationale as this: Honorable behavior breeds honorable behavior. Tolerating dishonorable behavior breeds more dishonorable behavior. Dishonorable behavior acts as an invasive cancer, eating away at integrity, trust, confidence and respect. It jeopardizes mission and thwarts duty.

In effect, the toleration clause means that honor trumps loyalty. Misguided loyalty results in blind faith. Trust rooted in honor is fully deserved and rewarded.

Simply not violating the will-nots doesn't ensure that one has internalized a sense of honor — but it's a start. The "end game" of the honor code is to develop officers, commanders and leaders whose character is clearly above reproach. "How you play the game" is integral to reaching the end game; the end is defined by the how.

Granted, some Air Force Academy cadets, and graduates, have not always brought honor to their institution. Periodic cheating scandals and worse, including the sexual assaults of recent years, cannot be condoned, rationalized or in any way tolerated.

But for those who continue at the service academies in Colorado Springs, West Point and Annapolis, honor is still taught and valued as the bedrock of their institutional cultures. At least they're trying.

At least that's what we were taught.

Yesterday, President Bush addressed the 2005 graduating class of the Naval Academy. Today, Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is scheduled to speak to the graduates at West Point. On Wednesday, Vice President Dick Cheney is scheduled to give the commencement address at my alma mater.

These three men will welcome 2,700 new lieutenants and ensigns to the "real" America that lies beyond the parade grounds, math blackboards and fields of friendly strife.

What might they say to these young officers to prepare them for what lies ahead? What pre-eminent American value should these future leaders embrace to guarantee success in the "real" America of the 21st century?

Just win, baby.

Whatever it takes. Make it happen. Ignore the rules. Make 'em prove it. It's not how, just how many. Failure's not an option; admitting it isn't, either.

Image is everything. Dress for success; line the right pockets. Say it is anyway. Claim a mandate. Perception is reality. Buy two forever and ever. Amen.

Do the deal. Round it up. Make the numbers. Cork the bat. Shoot the 'roids. Get the votes. Get the confession. Give 'em his medal, but don't tell 'em it was our bullet.

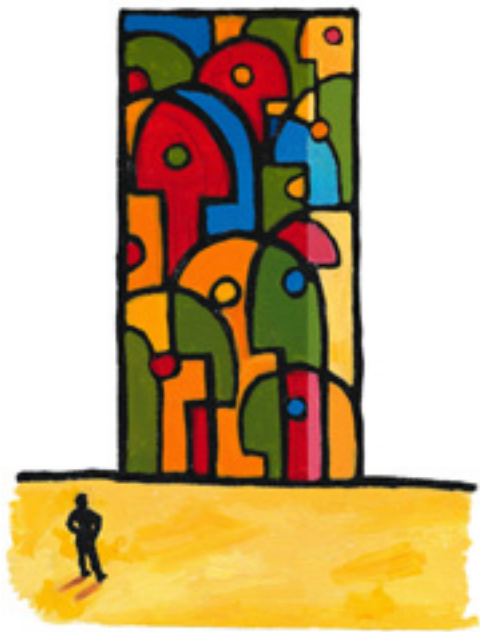
And, dude — keep it real. Cause "it's all good."

In 21st-century America, honor is an option — not necessary, not sufficient, desirable only if it doesn't jeopardize the bottom line. As an American value, it ranks a little above recycling but way below redistricting.

Americans talk a good game, but Col. Jessep had it right in *A Few Good Men:* We can't handle the truth.

We've tolerated our vain hypocrisies, quibbles and misrepresentations for so long that we can't distinguish fact from conviction, trust from hope, appearance from reality.

Reporting to the Classes of 2005, and to honor America: *May the Code be with you.*



But What If ...?

Today is graduation day at Texas Christian University. I teach a class in general semantics there, and seven of my 46 students will walk across the stage. Congratulations to them!

Their last semester in college provided a variety of learning opportunities — and one notable missed opportunity — particularly during the fortnight in which winter turned to spring.

Those two weeks began with a discussion about the Rev. Jeremiah Wright controversy and Sen. Barack Obama's speech on race in America. Then we talked about the decision of TCU and Brite Divinity School to move the March 29 portion of the Fourth Annual State of the Black Church Summit off campus. (Brite is on the TCU campus but is an independent institution.) For a year, Brite had planned the summit for the last weekend in March and had a long-standing invitation to Wright to attend and receive an award recognizing his 40 years of service to his church and ministry.

But the executive committee of TCU's board of trustees asked Brite to move the awards dinner off campus, which it did. My class was about evenly divided as to whether moving the event was the right thing to do in light of the purported concerns about "safety and security."

We learned something about the history of racism in America by viewing clips from Todd Larkins' documentary *The N Word: Divided We Stand* and segments from the PBS series on the civil rights movement, *Eyes on the Prize*.

We studied the distinction between the words people use and their behavior. Is it more appropriate to examine a person's behavior within a specific context or environment rather than focus

on whether this word or that word is used? Do actions speak louder than words? What if the action is nothing but words?

In *The N Word*, rapper Chuck D recognizes this distinction between word and behavior: "Words are words, but what comes right after the word is the activity. And the activity of being treated like a *nigger* is always in the air."

We listened to the song "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught" from the musical *South Pacific*. We heard that children must be taught to be afraid "of people whose eyes are oddly made, and people whose skin is a different shade .... to hate all the people your relatives hate."

To conclude our discussion on the controversy surrounding this event, I invited Star-Telegram columnist Bob Ray Sanders and University Christian Church's senior minister Tim Carson, one of Brite's trustees, to talk with the class. On April 3, we were fortunate to hear their unique "insider" perspectives.

We heard them express skepticism that "safety and security" concerns were the primary considerations that motivated the institution to move the event. We heard that the summit's organizers were turned away by 28 Fort Worth venues before they turned east to Dallas. We heard these two men express their own versions of the oft-heard statement that "this country needs to talk about race."

The next day marked the 40th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination.

With Wright's explosive emergence on the national airwaves, it would be understandable for Fort Worth and TCU to embrace in a collective, self-congratulatory sigh of relief for not letting that circus come to this town! It was a good call — prudent if not profound.

But what if ...? What if the original plans for March 29 had been kept? What might these students have learned if the TCU trustees' executive committee had heeded those oft-stated calls for a national conversation about race? What if that conversation had actually begun here, in Fort Worth, on March 29?

What if Wright had been given a receptive, respectful venue at which he could respond to the public condemnations hurled at

him? What might he have said then, rather than what he has pronounced after stewing in his self-imposed silence for another month?

This community had an opportunity to go beyond talking about talking about race. We could have started the conversation. Instead, we passed to avoid the front page, content to be merely a footnote.

Those who write history will determine whether this fortnight was just another two weeks in just another year, or whether it helped usher in a new season in the great American experiment of self-governance.

Or maybe this fortnight was just another two weeks of a 400-year winter that might never graduate to spring.

Nothing in human history that flowed from the decisions of governments has been inevitable. No historical event ever had to happen the way it happened. The counter-factual, the “could have been” in history is a unique and essential aspect of human intelligence. And it should always be recognized that options existed. Alternatives always have been available, and they always will be available.

Martin J. Sherwin

A Fence Sieve Language

> A culture cannot be discriminatingly accepted, much less be modified, except by persons who have seen through it—by persons who have cut holes in the confining stockade of verbalized symbols and so are able to look at the world and, by reflection, at themselves, in a new and relatively unprejudiced way.
>
> Aldous Huxley, "Culture and the Individual" (17)

During the first months of 2007, the American public, politicians, and media have banded together to up-armor our "confining stockade of verbalized symbols." Instead of cutting holes through which to self-reflexively evaluate ourselves, our language, and our behaviors, we have reinforced our ancient, pathological attitudes toward words and the people who use them.

The Don Imus affair (Google: *nappy-headed hos, jigaboos and wannabees, Rutgers women's basketball, MSNBC, CBS radio, WFAN, the Rev. Al Sharpton*) consumed the most print space and air time. But let's not forget some of the other examples of language behaviors that have prompted outrage, lawsuits, indifference, or in some cases, applause.

- Isaiah Washington, an actor on the television series "Grey's Anatomy," checked into a rehab center and began counseling after using the word faggot in reference to another actor on the show. (1)
- Ann Coulter, the blonde darling of a certain segment of conservative Republicans, joked during a presentation to the Conservative Political Action Conference that, "I was going to have a few comments on the other Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards, but it turns out you have to go into rehab

if you use the word 'faggot,' so I — so kind of an impasse, can't really talk about Edwards." (2)

- The family of a high school freshman filed a lawsuit against officials at Maria Carillo High School in California claiming the school denied the First Amendments rights of their daughter. The family is Mormon. The utterance at issue concerns the daughter's response to classmates who needled her with questions such as, "Do you have 10 moms?" She replied, "That's so gay." School officials gave her a warning on the grounds that it has an obligation to protect gay students from harassment. The parents' suit claims the phrase that's so gay "enjoys widespread currency in youth culture." The girl says the phrase means, "That's so stupid; that's so silly; that's so dumb." (3)
- The day after he officially announced his candidacy for the Democratic party's nomination for President, Senator Joe Biden (D-Delaware) said of fellow candidate Senator Barack Obama (D-Illinois), "I mean, you got the first mainstream African-American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy," Biden said. "I mean, that's a storybook, man." He was immediately besieged with controversy over the words "clean" and "articulate." (4)
- Four days later, Senator Obama illustrated how quickly "what goes around comes around" when he used the word "wasted" to refer to the lives of U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq. (5)
- A partner from one of the most prestigious law firms in the country, Fulbright & Jaworski, visited the law school at Duke University for recruiting purposes. During the course of an interview, the partner recounted a story about one of the firm's founders (Leon Jaworski) and his commitment to justice in the 1920s. Jaworski represented a black man accused of murder in Waco, TX, and faced a district attorney who used "the n word" to refer to the accused. A student who heard the story objected and complained, the dean of the law school wrote a letter to the entire law school, and the chairman of the executive committee at Fulbright & Jaworski traveled to Duke to apologize. (6,7)

- New York City Councilman Leroy Comrie embarked on a campaign to 'voluntarily' ban *the n word*. His campaign was featured in an "investigative report" on "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" by the "investigative team" of Larry Wilmore (an American black) and John Oliver (a British white). During the report, Oliver refers only to *the word* and leaves it to Wilmore to fill in the blanks with the word *nigger*. (8)
- "The Colbert Report," with Stephen Colbert, immediately followed Stewart's show and featured an interview with Jabari Asim, author of the new book, *The N Word: who can say it, who shouldn't, and why.* (9)
- City officials of the Bronx in New York City labeled a new German army training video as "racist" and demanded an apology from the German military. The video depicts an instructor describing a scenario to a trainee this way: "You are in the Bronx. A black van is stopping in front of you. Three African-Americans are getting out they are insulting your mother in the worst ways. Act!" (10)
- Rush Limbaugh began referring to Senator Barack Obama and actress Halle Berry, each of mixed-race parentage, as "Halfrican Americans." (11)

These examples come from just a four-month period. But they reveal just how confining our stockade of verbalized symbols has become.

In other words, it's become almost impossible to talk sensibly about how we talk. Forget about cutting holes ... we can't even make a dent.

Not that some haven't tried. Compare and contrast these attempts at explanation, elucidation, or explication:

> If you're 10 or 100, nappy-headed ho means the same thing.
> Al Sharpton on "Real Time with Bill Maher" (12)

> Did you want to name the book *The N Word* and they said, no, you've got to call it *The N Word*, or did you say, I want to name this book *The N Word* and they assumed you meant,

you know, *the n word* when in fact you meant *the n word*? *The n word* has become so anonymous [sic] with the *n word*. Is saying *the n word* pretty much like saying *the n word*? Because, I would never say *the n word*, but I don't want somebody to think I'm saying *the n word* by saying *the n word*.

Stephen Colbert to Jabari Asim (9)

It's really hard to address the language of racism without somehow directly engaging in that language.

Jabari Asim to Stephen Colbert (9)

[*After letting loose with 47 "equal opportunity" racial and religious epithets ...*] There is absolutely nothing wrong with any of those words, in and of themselves. They're only words. It's the context that counts. It's the user. It's the intention behind the words that makes them good or bad. The words are completely neutral. The words are innocent. I get tired of people talking about "bad words" and "bad language." Bullshit! It's the context that makes them good or bad.

George Carlin (13)

It doesn't matter, the origins of curse words. What matters is that civilization has decreed —arbitrarily, obviously—that certain words are inherently obscene.

Dennis Prager (14)

Words don't *mean*, only a person does. There is no meaning in a word. We sometimes talk about this as the container myth. Now you can put something in a glass—water, dirt, sand, anything. A glass will hold something, and we can talk about this as a container. A word, however, is not a container in the way a glass is. A container of *meaning* is a man, a woman. It's you. It's you listening, it is I talking. It is I listening, it's you talking. A word doesn't *mean*.

Irving J. Lee (15)

> Understandably, the use of the word offended the student.
>
> Katharine T. Bartlett,
> Dean, Duke University School of Law (7)

> There is no excuse for what happened on this campus. There is no context for which that is permissible conduct.
>
> Steven Pfeiffer, Fulbright & Jaworski (6)

It seems that two conflicting views are at work here, leading to these questions:

1. Do words have inherent meanings that exist and apply irrespective of speaker, listener, or context?
2. Do words have variable meanings that depend on context?
3. Is it more appropriate to talk in terms of "offensive language," in which specific "bad" 'words (profanities, obscenities, epithets) cause offense, justify outrage, and demand apology?
4. Is it more appropriate to talk in terms of "language that some find offensive," that recognizes each individual may respond according to his or her own standards of what offends them?
5. Do actions like banning, censoring, and penalizing certain words and terms aid or hinder our individual and societal efforts to "cut holes" through our current culture, to progress beyond our prejudices and stereotypes?

From my general semantics perspective, it's pretty easy to answer no, yes, no, yes, and *hinder*. What makes this so difficult for most people to understand? Or, what makes it so rewarding for people to perpetuate the "word=thing" identifications? I offer four inter-related possibilities.

Control

Language has always been used as a means for rulers to exercise their power over their dominion. Religious leaders, politicians, business bosses, military commanders, teachers, parents, lawyers ... virtually everyone is subject to someone else's control-

ling or directive language. We have been conditioned to respond to certain words in specific, somewhat predictable ways. Go to church and you can expect to hear language intended to provoke penitence, guilt, grace, thankfulness, humility, or charity. Go to a political rally and you'll get bombarded with carefully crafted words to evoke patriotism, civic duty, fear, pride, outrage.

As Alfred Korzybski observed in *Science and Sanity*, "those who rule the symbols, rule us." Rulers need predictable results and desired reactions. They need their constituents to identify the labels of choice with the rulers' desired attitudes and behaviors. If the people chose to deliberately and extensionally evaluate the assertions expressed by their rulers, then the rulers might well be forced to rule on substance, rather than by symbol.

Cop-out: Denying Personal Responsibility

Alfred Fleishman, co-founder of public relations giant Fleishman-Hillard, Inc., advocated general semantics in his own unique, street-wise way. One of the simple observations he would share with delinquent and troubled teenagers in St. Louis was, "Just because you call me a son of a bitch, that doesn't make me a son of a bitch." He encountered hundreds of youngsters in detention schools and jails who automatically reacted to being called a name ... just words ... in ways that caused pain, suffering, and despair to their victims, their families, and ultimately themselves. They didn't stop to think that they could react any differently to the name. The label (*boy, nigger, asshole,* etc.) made them do it. The devil must be in those words; remember comedian Flip Wilson's character Geraldine's universal excuse? "The devil made me do it."

A different aspect of personal responsibility is described by Irving J. Lee, who used the term *bypassing* to describe another aspect of lazy, indiscriminant listening. He explained that a listener has two choices when encountering language that isn't quite clear. The aware, responsible listener will ask the speaker, "What do you mean?" or pause to consider what the speaker might have intended. The lazy, unaware listener will immediately proceed to evaluate what the speaker says as if it were the listener talking; in

other words, he will assume (or demand) that the speaker uses the same words in the same way as himself. He will maintain that it's the speaker's responsibility to use the 'right' words, rather than the listener's responsibility to evaluate the speaker's intent.

In the latter case, the listener/reactor denies his own responsibility for interpreting, evaluating, and appropriately responding to the words of the speaker. The words (symbols) 'cause' the response, just as Pavlov's bell 'caused' his dog to respond. But Lee and Korzybski would contend that human beings have the capacity to act more appropriately than dogs.

Misunderstanding 'Reality'

As we learn more and more about our brains and nervous systems, Korzybski's formulation of the abstracting process continues to be validated. The brain orders and constructs our experiences from our sensory interactions through the nervous system to our ultimate evaluations of pleasure, pain, fear, etc. Therefore, like everything else, *meaning* is constructed by each of us, individually and uniquely. As Charles Sanders Peirce put it, "We don't get meaning, we respond with meaning."

However, a lot of people don't quite understand this or don't want to understand it. There are still many who believe that there is an "objective reality" out there that ought to be perceived "as it is." They rail against "relativism" without acknowledging the inevitable relativism (or *to-me-ness*) that results from the natural functioning of six billion different nervous systems. Which *one* of those six billion is the right one to say what *is* the true or inherent meaning of a statement, an event, or a symbol?

Identifying the 'Map' as the 'Territory'

Those who advocate eliminating or even banning certain words and phrases do not seem to grasp the symbolic nature of words. They misplace or misallocate their ire toward the word itself rather than on the underlying attitude, beliefs, and behaviors of the individuals who use the word.

Although Jabari Asim tries to straddle a difficult line in proposing that some people can use the word *nigger* but others

shouldn't, I support his statement quoted previously. From a literary and historical context, you cannot teach *Huckleberry Finn* without using the language of the time and understanding the attitudes of the time. (Not to mention that you can't re-write what the author wrote.) Neither can you arbitrarily dictate (or request, in the case of Councilman Comrie) that *nigger* be stricken and banned from music lyrics. If *nigger*, what next?

The hip-hop world took a lot of the collateral damage from the initial Imus bomb, to the extent that rap/hip-hop icon and impresario Russell Simmons co-authored a statement that read, "We recommend that the recording and broadcast industries voluntarily remove/bleep/delete the misogynistic words *bitch* and *ho*" as well as "a common racial epithet."

As if bleeping accomplishes anything other than calling attention to itself and, by extension, what got bleeped.

If one thinks through the logical consequences of bleeping, one comes full circle to the realization that it's the context, not the word, that establishes the basis for offense. Even without benefit of visually observing the following phrases spoken, do you have any doubt as to what the "bleep" stands for?

"I said drop your *bleeping* gun!"
"Go *bleep* yourself."
"Get the *bleep* out of here."
"You dirty son of a *bleep*!"
"This tastes so *bleeping* good ..."

Leave it to the comedians to shine illuminating light on this shadowy subject. In their "investigative report" on Councilman's Comrie's quest to ban a "word with no meaning," Wilborne and Oliver point out the potential consequences:

OLIVER: Leroy, are you at all concerned that we are banning one of the most versatile words in the English language? It can be used as a noun ...
WILBORNE: Yo, yo, whassup, my *nigga*?
OLIVER: A verb ...

WILBORNE: Hey, man, don't *nigger* those potato chips.
OLIVER: An adjective ...
WILBORNE: Oh, so now you *nigger* rich?
OLIVER: An adverb ...
WILBORNE: Man ... that's some *niggerly* [bleep].
OLIVER: Are we kissing goodbye to all of this?
COMRIE: I think that all of those usages are just vile and need to be stopped.
OLIVER: What do you say to rappers who need that word in terms of a rhyme scheme?
COMRIE: Need the word? I don't think you need the word.
WILBORNE: I'm not sure about that Leroy. Finish this phrase ... "I'm not saying she's a gold digger, but she ain't messin' with no broke ...
COMRIE: Hmm. (to himself) "I'm not saying she's a gold digger, but she ain't messing with no broke" ... *fool*.
WILBORNE: (pause) Do you understand how rap works, Councilman?

Wilborne and Oliver understand that context determines meaning, and, like George Carlin two generations before them, realize that the English language offers unlimited opportunities to poke comedic fun at our arbitrary and multiple usages. As Carlin pointed out thirty years ago, even order establishes context: "You can prick your finger. But don't finger your prick!"

A more serious reason to object to any type of ban, particularly with epithets, is that these words carry such strong social stigmas that their usage may serve a valuable purpose. Like the canary in the mine, or smoke that signals the possibility of burning embers, racial and religious epithets can alert us to the possibility of prejudice, bias, and hate within the speaker. If you ban the language, these people may comply with the ban and not say the word, but they may well continue to harbor the feelings and attitudes that may lead to discriminatory and prejudiced behaviors.

Huxley continued his "hole cutter" metaphor with this observation:

> What the would-be hole cutter needs is knowledge; knowledge of the past and present history of cultures in all their fantastic variety, and knowledge about the nature and limitations, the uses and abuses, of language.

We can learn a lot from our daily news outlets and entertainment programs regarding our attitudes towards language. Unfortunately, we (English-speaking Americans) seem to be backsliding toward the 19th century in terms of our dependence on the cultural crutch of verbal taboos. Consider how prematurely quaint the words of anthropologist Margaret Mead seem, as reported in an unnamed local newspaper in 1969:

> Anthropologist Margaret Mead says that the current binge of written and spoken four-letter words will also pass providing everyone doesn't become uptight about it. It's this uptightness in the current phraseology that is at the heart of the problem. We are in a temporary period when it is exciting to light up some-thing that was dark, saying words that were forbidden, exhibiting all sorts of things that weren't allowed before, but this excitement is going to wear out. (16)

Until we exit this "temporary period" (going on 38 years now) in which we insist on righteously playing *got'cha!* with offensive language, our public discourse about racism, sexism, violence, drugs, and even taxes will never progress to the substantive from the superficial.

We must be vigilant, however, in clearly discerning and discriminating between the effective uses and the manipulative or ignorant abuses of language. The more we focus on the words, labels, and categories, the less we concern ourselves with the individuals who use those symbols, and the individuals upon whom those symbols are slapped.

Because the words of Irving J. Lee will forever apply: "We tend to discriminate *against* people to the degree we fail to distinguish *between* them."

Why Make a Federal Case Out of Bad Words?

This is like one of those cartoon caption contests.

You know, like there's this completely frazzled fish lying on a psychiatrist's couch, distraught eyes fixed to the ceiling. And the super-serious but disinterested shrink sits across the room, pretending to listen . . . as he reads *Field and Stream*.

Or picture this: a super-serious attorney passionately pleads his case before nine ceremonially clad justices of the U.S. Supreme Court. One of the feeble old judges peers down over his bifocals to the attorney and asks, "But what if the indecent remark was really hilarious, very, very funny?"

One of those scenarios actually played out in real life last week. Can you guess which one?

As my late, late-night hero Johnny Carson (and before him, Jack Paar) used to say, "I kid you not." Or as my current late-night hero Jon Stewart would say, "Are you [EXPLETIVE DELETED] kidding me?"

Go back to last year for a minute. The Supreme Court heard a case in which it was asked to interpret what the Second Amendment to the Constitution really means.

Apparently, after almost 220 years, somebody actually read the thing: "A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed."

Does the right to keep and bear arms apply to well-regulated militias, or to the people?

Duh! By a resounding 5-4 majority, the Supremes interpreted the Second Amendment to mean that the people have the right to keep and bear arms. The reference to "well-regulated militia" was, basically, a red herring since everybody knows that all the militias

were de-regulated years ago. (I think it was after the airlines, probably before the telephone companies.)

So this year along comes the Federal Communications Commission to appear before the Supreme Court to argue about "patently offensive" material and the First Amendment.

Apparently, every 30 years the FCC has to make a federal case out of bad words. In 1978, it trucked up to the Supreme Court to hammer a radio station that played George Carlin's classic audio lecture on "filthy words."

Come on, people! How many times do these constitutional amendments have to be "interpreted"? The Constitution says what it says, it means what it means and that's that.

Deal with it!

But anyway, last week's trip to see the Supremes was necessary because the FCC had previously lost its case in the lower level federal appeals court.

What was at stake was the FCC's authority to levy multimillion-dollar fines against broadcasters for allowing even "fleeting expletives" to be broadcast over the public airwaves.

Over the past few years, the FCC has flip-flopped all over itself in its punitive decisions.

In January 2003, during a live televised broadcast, U2's Bono accepted a Golden Globe award by saying, "This is really, really f---ing brilliant."

In response to formal complaints, the FCC ruled "no harm, no foul" on this fleeting use of the word as an adjective.

But a year later, Janet Jackson exposed her, you know, during the Super Bowl XXXVIII halftime show.

A shocked — *shocked!* — nation demanded that this outrageous 1.5 seconds of filth be condemned and punished.

That little piece of anatomy was a game-changer for the politically responsive FCC.

Bono's no-no was back in play.

All words-denoted-by-their-first-letters became fair game for FCC fines, regardless of tense, form or usage; gerunds were just as guilty as nouns.

But then just 10 months after Janet Jackson's 1.5 seconds of fame, the FCC took no action against ABC Television after it broadcast, unedited, Steven Spielberg's epic *Saving Private Ryan*. Even though, I'm told, that film unapologetically, and apparently ungratuitously, uses the f-bomb 21 times.

Can you or can't you? Is it or isn't it?

So on the same day this week that 120 million Americans found something better to do with their time, the highest court in the land talked about dirty words using pre-pubescent euphemisms and words-denoted-by-their-first-letters.

They couldn't even bring themselves to say the words that were actually in contention.

And you can't read them or hear them in any "respectable" media outlet.

I think that's "really hilarious, very, very funny." In fact, I'd even say it's "really, really [EXPLETIVE DELETED] brilliant."

I kid you not.

There are two ways to slide easily through life:
Namely, to believe everything, or to doubt everything;
both ways save us from thinking.
Alfred Korzybski

How to Size Your (Thinking) Box

In the mid-80s, I clipped a Gary Larson "Far Side" cartoon that, at the time, reflected my disenchantment with my then-current management. The cartoon depicted a dinosaur addressing an auditorium of other dinosaurs:

> "The picture's pretty bleak, gentlemen ... the world's climates are changing, the mammals are taking over, and we all have a brain about the size of a walnut."

Over the years, the significance I draw from the humor has changed from an expression of frustration with managers to one of insight for managers.

For example, it's pretty easy to pick up on the importance of diversity. With a roomful of "gentlemen," absent any "ladies," no wonder this company of dinosaurs went out of business, so to speak.

And although they deserve high marks for their assessment of the situation, simply becoming aware of their plight didn't result in an appropriate change in their ability to adapt. Perhaps it had something to do with that walnut-sized brain. Could it be that, in this craniological context, size does indeed matter?

Regardless of size, it behooves us all to regularly practice with and exercise that three-pound organ between our ears. In short, we need to practice better thinking practices.

Now, I'm not referring to that trite cliche, to "think out of the box." Of course management wants us to "think out of the box." Have you ever been told, "Betty, I really need you to think *inside*

the box on this project"? You might as well say, "I've never had an original thought in my life and I don't plan to start now," as to say something like, "I pride myself on my ability to keep my thoughts well within the boundaries of my thinking box."

Instead, I'd like to use the six-sided structure of a metaphorical "thinking box" to suggest six dimensions or constraints that shape how, and what, you and I think.

1. The Base: Your Environment

Define *environment* to include everything around you — people, things, situations, relationships, customers, suppliers, friends, family, etc. Everything within this environment is changing, all the time. Sometimes these changes are not noticeable or apparent.

So we ought to keep an awareness of looking for these changes:

- Among customers, suppliers, programs, employees, etc., no two are the 'same' — $\text{Customer}_{(1)}$ is not $\text{Customer}_{(2)}$; $\text{Supplier}_{(1)}$ is not $\text{Supplier}_{(2)}$.
- Even the 'same' $\text{Customer}_{(1)}$ ... that Customer changes over time. So that the Program Office you dealt with in 1997 is NOT the 'same' Program Office you're dealing with in 2000, which you can expect to not be the same Program Office in 2002.
- In our particular business, "The Customer" is seldom singular; we almost always have multiple constituencies to serve, both in terms of individuals and in terms of offices or functions.

So we need to acknowledge and maintain continual awareness of these changes in our environments.

2. The Back Wall: Your Individual Past Experiences

You are unique! Guess what? So is everybody else!

We each come from different backgrounds, different viewpoints, different attitudes, different values, different beliefs. Each one of us brings a unique "to-me-ness" to any project or situation; you could add the words *to me* after just about any observation you make.

Next time you're in a meeting, look around the room and think about how your background is different from everyone else's; think of ways in which you might be looking at the problem or the issue differently than anybody else.

And consider how the backgrounds of everyone else are different from yours, and how might their backgrounds might lead them to differing perspectives or opinions from yours.

3. A Side Wall: Your Assumptions

We all know the old joke about assumptions and *Ass-u-me*, but we cannot avoid, nor should we attempt to avoid, assumptions. The key is to bring as many of our assumptions into our awareness as possible. Recognize that many of our really significant assumptions may be hidden, or unstated, examples:

- Driving your car
- Eating the food at the restaurant
- Sitting down on your chair

Consider the implications of these often unstated business assumptions: *any order is a good order; any business is good business; our products sell themselves; if it took us a year before, it'll take us a year now*.

I consider assumptions, premises, beliefs, inferences, etc., as similar and somewhat interchangeable; as opposed to 'facts'. Here are the critieria I would propose for a 'fact':

- Can be made only after an observation, experiences, etc.; therefore, I don't consider it a fact to say, regardless of the conviction, "We will win this program"; "We will make our orders forecast"
- Stays with what can be observed, does not speculate or presume as to intent or motivation; "The competition requested an extension because they obviously are having technical problems." Is that a fact? No, it's an opinion, a judgment, an inference .... it's a guess.
- As close to certainty as humanly possible - would you bet your life on it?

Compare those criteria to the characteristics of an assumption or inference:

- Can be made anytime, including the present and future
- Goes beyond what is observed, speculates as to intent, motivation, quality, purpose, meaning, etc. .... "it happened because ...."
- Only expressed in terms of degrees of possibility or probability, not certainty

In his autobiography, former Chrysler chairman Lee Iacocca advised: "*The discipline of writing something down is the first step towards making it happen*." In the context of assumptions, I'd modify that to say this, "*The discipline of writing down your assumptions is the first step towards making sure you don't trip over them later*."

4. The Opposite Wall: Your Expectations

You have expectations of results or outcomes, such as to expect an award of a contract by a certain date, or you expect certain competitors to make a bid.

You have expectations of other people, such as your boss, your subordinates, your peers, your friends, your kids, your parents, your neighbors.

And you expectations of yourself.

I'm going to go against the grain of conventional wisdom and motivational speakers and suggest that you practice *lowering* your expectations. All that aggressive Zig Ziglar *can do, just do it, charge the hill!* attitude needs to be tempered with realistic assessments and expectations.

Why? Disappointments result from unrealized expectations, whether it's somebody else failing to live up to your expectations, you failing to live up to theirs, or you failing to live up to your own. I think there's wisdom in the aphorism to "Under promise, over deliver."

At the Air Force Academy, we used to have a saying: "*If the minimum wasn't good enough, it wouldn't be the minimum*." From a management perspective, "*If the minimum isn't good enough, it shouldn't be the minimum.*"

If you allow your expectations to get out of control, then your thinking is probably going to follow. For example, I once worked on a development program for the U.S. Army weapon system called Javelin. Our baseline contract called for a 36-month, $170M program, even though our Army Project Management Office knew it wasn't possible.

Two years into the program, as we re-planned our third major re-structuring, one of our business managers joked, "*Nobody thought this was a 36-month, $170M program … but we proved 'em wrong. No matter what, we're always 36 months and $170M away from completion*."

5. The Front Panel: Your "World View"

Your "world view" might be thought of in terms of your own unique filters or screens or attitudes that determine how you see and make sense of the world. How much do you relate to statements such as:

- This is the best of all possible worlds and it couldn't possibly be any better.
- You're either for us or against us.
- There's nothing new under the sun.
- Everything happens for a reason.

- It just wasn't meant to be.
- There's no such thing as luck.
- *Que sera, sera*; whatever will be, will be.
- They just don't understand what we do down here in Dallas!

We each hold different world views, which have resulted from our unique backgrounds, experiences, assumptions and expectations. It's worthwhile to occasionally re-examine your orientation with respect to its applicability and appropriateness: Does my world view, or my 'map' of what's going on, still adequately and appropriately represent what's going on? In the world? On my program? In my market space?

6. The Lid: Your Language

There's the language you use everyday to think, talk, listen, write, read, and the language you use as you analyze your thinking, talking, listening, writing, reading, etc.

As map is to the territory it represents, your language should appropriately represent what goes on around you. We've already talked about the importance of discriminating facts from inferences and assumptions. For the most part, we live in worlds where there aren't clear-cut "either-or" choices: not black-or-white; not right-or-wrong; shades of grayish ambiguity everywhere we look. As much as we might wish otherwise, the notion of a specific, clearly-worded, unambiguous requirement or specification is always desired … but almost always impossible, not only in our work but in our daily lives.

We ought to maintain an "on guard" attitude of expecting to be misunderstood, and to misunderstand, rather than assuming than people will automatically understand what we mean just because they seem to understand each of the words.

In general semantics we have a notion we refer to as "English Minus Absolutes". Avoid all-inclusive or exclusive terms unless you're positive they're accurate and appropriate to the context. Be on the lookout for inappropriate uses of phrases like: *always,*

never, fully, totally, without exceptions, exact, exactly the same, no different than, 100%, all, none, and, of course … absolutely!

By the same token, avoid terms that don't really mean anything without some other relational data point: *low cost, early, low risk* - lower than what? Earlier than when?

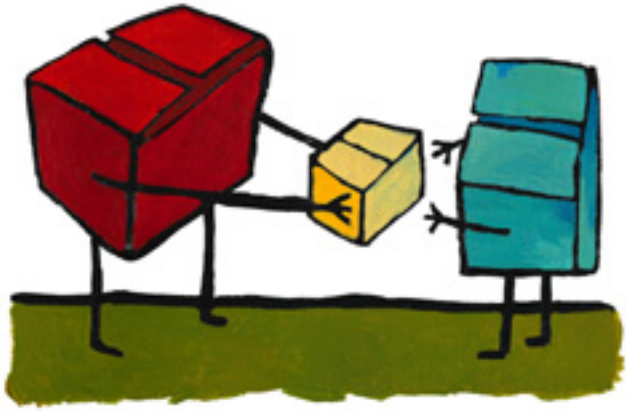
Now, I realize that in the competitive landscape we're in, sometimes it's difficult to adhere to this advice (especially in competitive proposals), but at least among ourselves, let's not fool ourselves!

We need to be thoughtful, aware, innovative and creative employees. And managers. And parents. And spouses. And friends. We need to think, and act, and react, in ways that are appropriate to the situation, to the context, to the program, to the individual relationships we're dealing with at that particular moment.

We do well if we regularly assess, and make appropriate adjustments to, these six factors that shape and constrain our thinking:

1. Our Environment
2. Our individually-unique Past Experiences
3. Our Assumptions (including those that are unstated)
4. Our Expectations
5. Our own unique World View
6. And finally the Language we use to communicate with others, and perhaps more importantly, the language we use to communicate with ourselves.

The dinosaurs mentioned earlier had a limiting factor that precluded their ability to adapt to their situation — they had brains the size of walnuts. I believe it fair to speculate that most of us in this room don't have that limitation. We ought to not only adapt, but to thrive.



The trouble with people is not so much with their ignorance
as it is with their knowing so many things that are not so.
attributed to **William Alanson White and Josh Billings**

A great many people think they are thinking
when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.
William James

The greatest challenge to any thinker is stating the problem
in a way that will allow a solution.
Bertrand Russell

The world we have created today as a result of our thinking thus far has
problems which cannot be solved by thinking the way
we thought when we created them.
Albert Einstein

The Bridge at Neverwas

Once upon a time there was a beautiful valley land known as Neverwas. The people who settled in Neverwas loved it, for it provided everything they needed to live and prosper. There were fertile fields for farming, mountains for mining and timber and a broad river with crystal clear water that flowed down from the surrounding mountains and through the valley.

West of the valley on the other side of the mountains, a natural harbor provided access to the open seas. To the east, as far as anyone could see, a great golden plain extended into the rising sun.

The Neverwas-ites felt truly blessed, except for the one difficulty in their near-paradise. The mighty river, which in many ways represented the life force of the people and the land, divided Neverwas into two distinct lands: the mountains with the mines and timber sat west of the river, with the ocean still further west; the great fertile farmland and endless plains lay to the east of the river. The people of Neverwas could only cross the broad river twice a year when the river flow slowed enough to allow them to guide their flat-bottomed barges with long poles.

Over the years, the Neverwas-ites adapted to the challenges resulting from their river divide. The Eastsiders had long ago learned to irrigate their vast fields, which provided predictable high yields regardless of each season's rains. They grew a healthy variety of food crops, and also cotton for making clothes. On the east side of the river, they built great mills powered by the steady

flow of the river and processed their grains into flour and meal. The Eastsiders became experts in growing and processing the crops that their fertile fields produced.

Meanwhile, the Westsiders on the other side of the river learned to mine the mountain ore and forge metal tools and utensils. The trees from the mountain forests provided plentiful wood for building shelters and eventually boats. They learned how to harness the power of the river to mill the lumber. They became expert builders and designers, making use of their seemingly never-ending supply of timber and ore to engineer new tools, devices, and structures. Some of the Westsiders became sailors, and over the years they learned to venture out well beyond the Neverwas harbor.

And twice a year, every year, the people on both sides of the river devoted themselves to crossing the river and exchanging food, cloth, timber, tools, utensils — all the goods that had to be traded in order for people on both sides of the river to live and prosper.

The one thing that all Neverwas-ties shared, regardless of which side of the river they on, was the brilliant sky above. Over the years, the Eastsiders observed and tracked the changing shapes and patterns of the stars and heavenly bodies. Over the years, they took note of the skyscape arrangement when certain events occurred in their land. When they experienced great joy upon the births of new babies, they looked to the sky; when their crop harvests were bountiful, when the river brought them many fish, whenever good fortune embraced them, they looked at the sky. And they also looked to the sky when they experienced great suffering during plagues, droughts, floods, and other tragedies. So through the years, they began to correlate connections between the arrangements in the sky and the triumphs and tragedies they experienced on the land. They wove wonderful stories about the creatures and characters they saw in the star patterns, and passed these stories down from generation to generation.

Like their neighbors to the east, the Westsiders developed a fascination with the sky. Over the years, they also carefully watched the movement of the moon and stars. They learned how

to predict when certain formations would appear, and where in the sky they would appear. As their sailors began to sail farther away from Neverwas, they observed and tracked how that the skyscape positions changed.

Over the years, the seafaring Westsiders charted the sky formations, noting the dates, times, and locations of the moon and the brightest stars. They used their knowledge of mathematics to calculate and predict their location based on the position of the moon and stars. They eventually learned how to navigate the vast ocean by using the sky landscape to guide them.

Over the years, the council leaders of Neverwas met together to talk about how they could make life better for people on both sides of the river. Every year, the leaders from both sides discussed how wonderful it would be if they could cross the river throughout the year, rather than just twice a year using the pole-driven flat-bottomed barges. Every year, the leaders would speculate how wonderful it would be if there was a bridge at Neverwas. But on one side of the river, the Eastsiders knew nothing about designing or building bridges, and on the other side, the Westsiders, even with their best engineers, had no idea how they could build a bridge that would span the broad expanse of the river.

One year, sailors from the west side returned from a long trip across the ocean with exciting news for the engineers. They had visited a faraway land and observed the largest and stoutest bridge they had ever seen! This great bridge spanned a river even broader than the Neverwas river, according to the sailors. The engineers were skeptical. How was that possible? They had to see it for themselves. They pooled their resources and selected their three most trusted engineers to sail on the next boat out to see this great bridge.

Months later, the boat carrying the engineers returned to Neverwas. The engineers sprang from the deck of the boat onto the dock, so eager were they to get started on their own bridge. For they had indeed seen the great foreign bridge! It did exist, and the engineers brought back detailed sketches of the bridge's ingenious design. The engineers and the mathematicians

immediately set about reproducing the structural calculations to design a bridge for the river at Neverwas.

Word spread quickly on both sides of the river about the prospects for the long-awaited bridge. It was finally going to happen! The farmers and the mill operators on the east side of the river started looking for new land to acquire to grow more crops and mill more grain as they anticipated great riches from increased trade to the west side and beyond. The loggers and the builders on the west side began stockpiling building materials as they anticipated a great building boom on the east side, thanks to the easy transportation the bridge would bring.

For one long year, all of the Neverwas-ites waited for the engineers to finish the designs for the bridge. The people on both sides of the river elected representatives to a new council, specially formed to oversee the bridge project. On the day that the new council was briefed on the project plans, there were great celebrations all across the land.

But the celebrations were brief. For the engineers from the west side had devised a plan for the bridge that the Eastsiders could not accept. The problem was not in the design or the structure or the cost of the bridge, but its location.

The plans specified that the bridge was to be built at the place where the river was narrowest and straightest. The lead engineer explained that this was the only feasible place where the bridge could be built for three reasons:

1. This was where the river was most narrow, so there was more margin for error that the supporting structures on each side of the river could bear the weight of the span.
2. This was where the river ran straightest, so there was less risk to the support structures in case of erosion or flood.
3. Due to the mountains on the west side of the river, this was the only location where there was adequate access to build a roadway that could connect to the bridge on the west side.

But the east side leader strongly objected to this location. It was simply not possible to build the bridge at this spot, he exclaimed, for three reasons:

1. Three hundred years before, there had been a great drought on the east side of the river. The great drought was broken only after the Eastsiders had gathered at this very spot to prayerfully appeal to the stars above. Every year since, the Eastsiders held a festival to celebrate and appeal to the star gods that there would never again be such a devastating drought. The bridge could not be built on this sacred site.
2. Their best and most revered sky readers had revealed that the stars in the heavens favored a site three miles up river, near a hill on which the Eastsiders had always gathered to gaze up at the night sky.
3. The east side mill operators and farmers also supported the same site three miles up river, where the river happened to run the fastest and widest. But it also happened that three large mills were already planned to be built there, and the site bordered the farms of the two wealthiest and most powerful farmers in Neverwas.

For five long years, the Westsiders and the Eastsiders argued about where the bridge might be built. For every location the west side engineers considered workable, the Eastsiders objected. For every location offered by the Eastsiders, the Westsider engineers calculated it to be unworkable.

And so it happened that one spring, there was an abundance of rain and the river swelled and was in danger of flooding both sides of Neverwas. The Eastsiders gathered on their sacred spot, now threatened by the rapidly rising water, at the very spot the bridge had been proposed. They prayed and appealed to the stars in the heavens for the rains to stop.

Despite their appeals and prayers, the storms grew even stronger. The river rose rapidly, flooding the farmers' fields to the east. There were terrible lightning strikes over the mountains, causing devastating fires to the timber structures in the villages. Before the rains eventually doused the fires, many of the buildings on the west side burned to the ground. One of the buildings that burned was where all of the plans, sketches, and designs for the bridge were stored.

And that's how the bridge at Neverwas never was built.

PART 4
Some History

General Semantics Across the Curriculum

As time-binders, we inherit the potential to build on the accomplishments of those we follow. Our time-binding legacy comes with many responsibilities, one of which is to recognize and honor our benefactors such that our accomplishments not be confused with theirs.

This special issue of *ETC* (December 2004) offers a selection of "old school" articles that reflects both the breadth of general semantics, and its relevancy to many of the 'educational' — both institutional and individual — challenges that confront us in 2004. Drawn from the archives of this journal, the *General Semantics Bulletin,* and the Institute's library, these articles offer the dual benefits of a) insightful perspective, and b) current relevancy.

For example:

1. Read Walter Probert's "Law Talk and Words Consciousness" from the perspective of the Patriot Act, "zero tolerance" laws and "three strikes and you're out" sentencing mandates.
2. Read Ken Johnson's "Epistemology and Mass Media" and see how it affects your watching, listening, and reading of "the news" in light of the recent "Rathergate" affair.
3. Remembering the hysteria that followed the Janet Jackson "wardrobe malfunction" during the Super Bowl halftime last year, read about the underlying attitudes that result in our

various forms of cultural taboos in Allen Walker Read's "The Geolinguistics of Verbal Taboo."

4. Consider the prevalence of disaffected youth, gangs and graffiti wars in cities across the nation, then read "How to Teach General Semantics to Those Less Likely to Succeed" by Alfred Fleishman.
5. Read any of the general descriptions of general semantics — even those intended for secondary school students — and analyze the inability to differentiate symbol from what is symbolized in this political ad:

(Shots of the American Flag, Jefferson Monument, Washington Monument)

Voice-over: Symbols. They represent the best things in America. Freedom ... Valor ... Sacrifice.

(Footage of Marine Honor Guard)

Voice-over: Symbols, like the heroes they represent, are meant to be respected.

(Footage of WWII Veterans)

Voice-over: Some didn't share that respect ... and turned their backs on their brothers.

(Footage of anti-war rally/Medal Toss event attended by John Kerry in Washington, April 23, 1971) (Interview with John Kerry, "Viewpoints," 1971)

Kerry: " ... renounce the symbols which country gives ... and that was the medals themselves ... I gave back — I can't remember — six, seven, eight, nine ..."

(Picture of John Kerry)

Voice-over: How can the man who renounced his country's symbols now be trusted? (1)

As you read the articles in this compilation, you may notice that certain formulations or principles of GS tend to appear again and again, such as:

- the process of *abstracting*
- problems associated with *identification,* or not recognizing the different orders or levels of *abstracting*
- instances of *allness* thinking-feeling-behaving
- the difference between *extensional* and *intensional* orientations
- failure to distinguish between *facts* and *inferences*
- application of the *extensional devices* — indexes, dates, quotes, hyphens and the etc.
- the importance of bringing new ways of thinking to problems; in other words, applying a *scientific attitude* toward everyday life situations

That these formulations tend to be repeated underscores their importance. As Alfred Korzybski was said to have reiterated in his seminars, "you have to *rrrub* it in!" A lesson we might infer from these articles is to not underestimate how difficult it is to consciously apply these 'simple' notions when we need them. It takes practice.

The articles in this compilation were written from 1935 through the mid-1980s. For the most part, the original text has been retained but some formatting has been changed to ease readability. References to gender have not been altered or edited to reflect a more current sensibility toward, for instance, using *man* rather than *human* or *he* as applying to both genders. Most of the authors died long ago, and references to their contemporaries who are now dead have not been amended. Certain words and terms may seem awkward, and perhaps even 'offensive' to 21st-century sensitivities.

These editorial decisions may prove challenging to some readers. I hope you'll accept the challenge to consider this as a

type of experiment. Can you read something from the perspective of the time in which it was written, applying, say, 1950 standards instead of current ones? Can you resist the temptation to quickly dismiss 'dated' notions and explanations; instead, can you maintain an attitude of open-mindedness: "What is here for me to learn? How can I relate this to my own experiences?"

If you find yourself tempted to disapprovingly judge a phrase, a term, or attitude because you$_{2004}$ "know better," perhaps you might keep in mind the caution of Cassius J. Keyser:

> The present is no more exempt from the sneer of the future than the past has been. (2)

Allen Walker Read

Within this issue dedicated to time-binders *across the curriculum,* we pay special tribute to Allen Walker Read. Allen died in October 2002 at age 96, three months after his wife of 49 years, Charlotte Schuchardt Read, died at age 92. Charlotte's professional life concentrated on general semantics (she began her work as Korzybski's literary secretary in 1939) and also included work with Charlotte Selver in sensory awareness.

Allen's professional work, however, did not pertain directly to general semantics, *per se.* A professor of English at Columbia University from 1945 to 1974, his professional achievements were more widely recognized within the disciplines of linguistics, lexicography, and etymology. While he wrote about two dozen papers specifically for GS audiences, he wrote over two hundred papers that documented his investigations in these more specialized academic areas.

The notion for this tribute to Allen came last April. I received a copy of *GEOLINGUISTICS,* annual journal of the American Society of Geolinguistics, compliments of editor Wayne H. Finke. (3) The issue featured a memoriam about Allen written by Professor Jesse Levitt, as well as a previously unpublished speech Allen presented in 1970, "The Geolinguistics of Verbal Taboo," edited by Professor Levitt.

I sought permission from Professor Finke to reprint both articles in *ETC.* He graciously approved the request. I then contacted Professor Richard W. Bailey at the University of Michigan, editor of *Milestones in the History of American English,* a collection of Allen's papers published by Duke University Press in 2002. (4) Professor Bailey agreed to edit his introduction to *Milestones,* originally written before Allen died.

From the two dozen articles that have been published in *ETC* and the *General Semantics Bulletin,* I selected two for this special tribute. (A listing of his articles in these publications appears on page 463.)

These five selections by, and about, Allen Walker Read reflect his passionate dedication to his work. This passion manifested itself through a necessarily dispassionate, "matter-of-fact," and scientific methodology. He observed that unique dimension of human behavior we call "language" and investigated that behavior through painstaking and meticulous research. He theorized his findings, then sought additional evidence to confirm or disprove those findings, never satisfied with any finding as "final." He did so with such an evident joy, humility and lack of pretension that a featured profile of him for *The New Yorker* magazine was titled, "At Play in the Language." Michelle Stacey's profile includes an accounting of Read's arguably most notable achievement, formulating the definitive (so far) explanation of how that distinctively American term, "O.K." originated. (5)

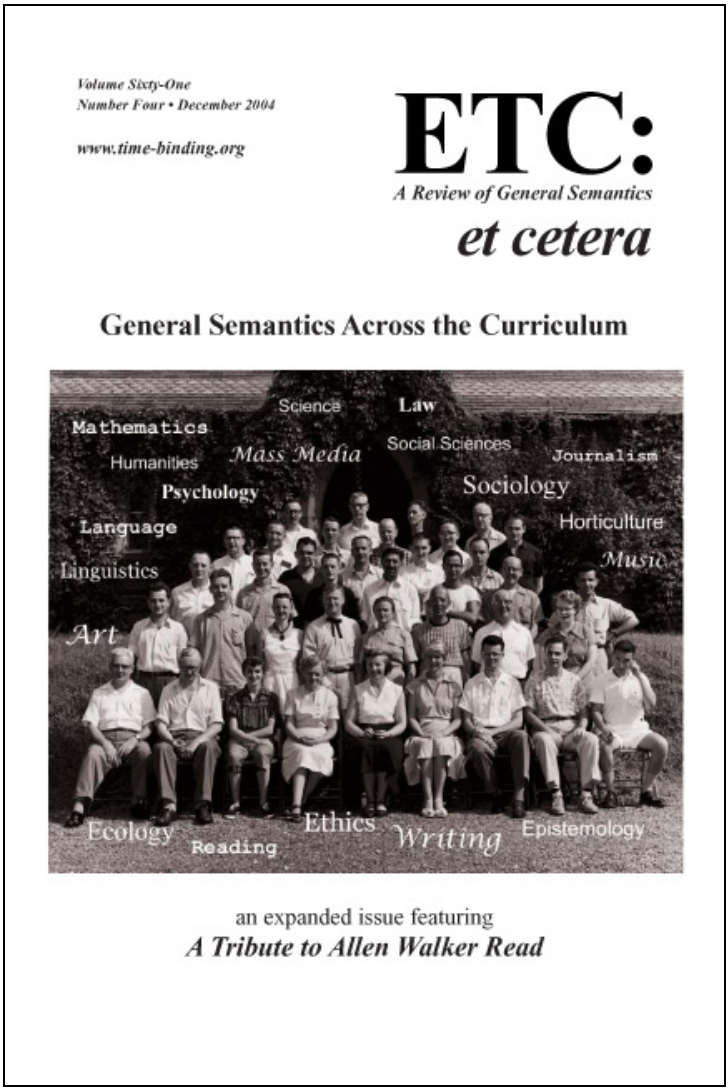
Allen and Charlotte each served as role models of what Korzybski called the "extensional orientation." As Susan Presby Kodish noted in last year's *General Semantics Bulletin,* "Were Abraham Maslow still alive, I'd nominate them for inclusion in his pantheon of self-actualized, fully-human individuals." (6)

I thank Professors Finke, Levitt, and Bailey for their cooperation and contributions to these pages. I also wish to recognize and thank William Safire of *The New York Times* for his *homage* that prefaces this well-deserved and overdue tribute to Allen Walker Read.

About the Cover Photo

- The cover photo documents the staff and participants who attended the IGS summer seminar-workshop at Bard College, NY, August 13-28, 1955.
- This photo supports the overall theme of "General Semantics Across the Curriculum" in that a) the setting is a college campus, complete with walls of ivy; and b) some noteworthy individuals participated in this seminar.
- Buckminster Fuller (first standing row, second from right), author and inventor, lectured during the second-week workshop.
- Abraham Maslow (second standing row, center, with mustache), psychologist, author, also presented as a guest lecturer.
- Dr. Russell Meyers (first standing row, fourth from left with tie), Chief of Neuro-Surgery at the University of Iowa, former President of the International Society for General Semantics, presented as a guest lecturer.
- Ray Bontrager (first standing row, third from right), Professor of Education and Psychology at California (PA) State College, Fellow of the Institute of General Semantics, and principal lecturer for the seminar.
- Dr. Marjorie A. Swanson (first standing row, far right), Professor of Bio-chemistry at Bowman Gray Medical School (now Wake Forest University, North Carolina), lecturer for the seminar.
- M. Kendig (first standing row, center), Director of the Institute.
- Charlotte Schuchardt Read (first standing row, third from right), Trustee of the Institute and seminar lecturer.
- Allen Walker Read (not pictured), presented as a guest lecturer.
- Harry Maynard (fourth row standing, far right, dark shirt), *Time Magazine* executive, later to serve on the Boards of both the Institute and International Society for General Semantics.

- Robert K. Straus (fourth row standing, immediately behind Maslow), served on the Board of the Institute and presented as guest lecturer.
- Catherine Minteer (not pictured), studied at Northwestern University under Irving J. Lee, taught secondary school English, authored two books for students, *Understanding in a World of Words* and *WORDS and What They Do to You.*



Snooping Around the Time-Binding Attic

The archives of the Institute of General Semantics contain three generations of history, not only in terms of the institution and "the work" of general semantics, but also as a fascinating slice of 20th century American living. If you've ever snooped around your grandparents' attic or garage, you might easily imagine what's in the IGS archives. (Or, to pay homage to our late friend Dave Bourland, who played e-primary roles in the history of both the Institute and the International Society, you might easily imagine what "locates" in the IGS archives.)

On a generalized *descriptive* level, the archives consist of:

- A library with approximately 2,500 books, including several hundred from Alfred Korzybski's personal collection. Some of the books bear inscriptions and signatures by the author, such as Bertrand Russell's *Principia Mathematica.* We also have editions from each printing of *Manhood of Humanity* and *Science and Sanity,* including some inscribed by Korzybski to his wife Mira and co-workers.
- Three credenzas filled with 1,100 recordings on various media, including wire recordings, SoundScriber tapes, reel-to-reel tapes, cassette tapes, 16 mm movie films, and videotape.
- Twenty-three file cabinets and about 40 storage boxes containing all manner of printed materials-personal correspondence of Korzybski, Kendig, and others; official Institute correspondence, financial reports, and administrative items; minutes of Trustee meetings; seminar notes, transcripts, and records; reprints of more than 175 articles by 300 different authors dealing with general semantics or used in seminar-workshops; hundreds of newspaper clippings and photographs; and etc. Lots of *etc.*

- Many of Korzybski's personal items, including: his cane; a photo of himself and the future General George S. Patton and their wives engaging in what appears to be late-night frivolity involving a World War I tank; one of his hand-made mahogany Structural Differential models (he made and sold at least 54 of them); his leather monogrammed cover for Science and Sanity, which included a detachable version of the Structural Differential affixed to the inside of the back cover; and most of the items on and around his desk at the time of death on March 1, 1950, including four copies of the New York Times dated the last week of February.

Beyond this *descriptive* level, any attempt on my part to convey something about the *significance* of the archives, or the meanings of any individual piece or collection of pieces, or speculations as to "what happened," or assessments of "what so-and-so was like," would, of course, be biased by my own specific-to-me abstracting. Even as I endeavor to accurately *report* "what's there" in the archives, these biases will undeniably influence what I select to report, and what I select to *not report.* In any event, to "objectively report" represents, for me, a physio-and-logical oxymoron, without respect to its seemingly innocuous linguistic possibility.

Let me add to that the usual general semantics caveat that "more can always be said," and I'll begin this series by relating a few historical items pertaining to the principal function of the Institute of General Semantics to educate and train individuals to apply the methodology of general semantics in their daily living.

IGS Seminars

Alfred Korzybski established the Institute of General Semantics in Chicago in 1938, after the publication of his *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics* in late 1933. (Note the often overlooked sub-title: *An* — singular — and *Systems* — plural. Due to its dark blue binding, Korzybski sometimes referred to *Science and Sanity* as "The Blue

Peril .") Until he established the Institute, Korzybski traveled the country to promote the book, lecture, and offer seminars to train readers and students how to apply in practice the theoretical formulations.

So far as I've found, the first seminar was conducted at the Barstow School for Girls in Kansas City, from January 20th to February 20th, 1935. The school's first-year Director, Marjorie Mercer Kendig, had read *Science and Sanity* immediately after its publication. Thirty-one years later, Kendig (as she was known by intimates) recounted her first encounter with Korzybski:

> On Wednesday afternoon, eight August, 1934, in an old brownstone house at 321 Carlton Avenue, Brooklyn, I climbed four flights of stairs and, looking up, saw my first glimpse of Alfred Korzybski — round face, shaven head, thin, khaki-clad, leaning on a cane, beaming down at me over the banister. More stairs and he was greeting me continental fashion with a kiss-the-hand and warm *thank-yous* for coming to see him. A few more stairs, out a door, across a roof and into a little shack — the so-called 'penthouse' — which had been his 'home base' for years. We sat at the desk in his 'corner' where he wrote the last drafts of *Science and Sanity,* corrected galleys and page proofs, and finally put it to press in 1933. We talked for hours about the revolution I wanted to bring about in the school of which I had recently been appointed Director. I hadn't the faintest notion then that the revolution would be in me and be far more fundamental and lasting than anything I was able to do with Korzybski's teachings and with his help at the school.

Four years later, after three years at the Barstow school, Kendig joined Korzybski in Chicago to establish the Institute and became its Educational Director.

Between January 1935 and the first seminar offered by the Institute in July 1938, Korzybski delivered seminars or lectures at twelve colleges and universities (University of Kansas, Washington State Normal School which hosted the First American Congress for

General Semantics in March 1935, University of Washington, Williams Institute in Berkeley, University of Michigan, Olivet College in Michigan, the Wistar Institute in Philadelphia, the Galois Institute of Mathematics at Long Island University, Columbia, Northwestern University, the University of Chicago, and Harvard); three hospitals (the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, New Jersey's Marlboro State Hospital, and Peoria, Illinois, State Hospital); and at conferences and privately-organized seminars in St. Louis and in Los Angeles.

In the summer of 1935, Korzybski spent three weeks lecturing at the Williams Institute, founded by his close acquaintance, Cora Williams, in Berkeley, California. A young Williams student named Lloyd Morain drew the assignment of "tending to" Korzybski during his stay — delivering meals to his room, bringing his mail, running errands, etc. One of his assignments, according to Morain, was to ensure that the school's distinguished guest lecturer be served only one bottle of wine in the evenings. (1)

Several of Korzybski's lectures were recorded, either by shorthand notes or recording device, then transcribed. The earliest transcription, probably taken from shorthand notes, is from his opening lecture on July 9, 1937, at Northwestern University. He began that seminar with this introduction:

> At this seminar we get a glimpse of several important problems connected with what might be called 'human adjustment' to human conditions of life as they come. You all have your personal lives and you have your personal orientations to conditions in your personal lives, don't you? The whole lot of us have certain conditions under which we live. Are we adjusted to these conditions or are we not? That is the main problem.

The Institute officially opened in May 1938, thanks to initial funding by Mr. Cornelius Crane, in a rented apartment located at 1330 E. 56th Street in south Chicago, two blocks from the University of Chicago. A year later, the Institute moved one block west to a more accommodating apartment at 1234 E. 56th. (Some

students referred to this as the “magic house.” One critic of Korzybski accused him in writing of being a numerologist and implied he lobbied to have the address of the building changed just to gain this “magical” 6-numeral sequential address. The critic apparently didn’t understand that, in this case, the ‘map’ moved as the ‘territory’ moved.)

The first seminar sponsored by the new Institute began on July 6th, 1938, a Wednesday evening, at 7:30 p.m. The seminar included twelve lectures, meeting on Monday and Wednesday evenings over a six-week period. His students generally evaluated Korzybski as an exceptional teacher, but his style was strictly lecture. He did make effective use of anecdotes, examples, humor, surprise, diagrams, and models, and he used language that might charitably be termed *blunt* and *matter-of-fact.* Due to his difficulty in hearing, he discouraged students from interrupting lectures with questions. Instead, his final session of the seminar included a question and answer session in which he took written questions from students. Tuition was $15 — roughly $150 or so in today’s dollars. Forty students registered for this first IGS seminar. Seating was assigned — shortest to tallest, front to back.

Korzybski began the first Institute seminar with this explanation of “what is general semantics?”

> What is *general semantics?* Why GS? You should get from the beginning a *type* of reaction. One of the main points is how the reaction can be molded. When we come to the problem on meaning — *significance* — we are up against every kind of human difficulty.
>
> In revising semantics, I am adding the word *general,* and also have enlarged the meaning in the sense that it turns out to be a general theory of values — *evaluation.* You will hear quite a bit about mathematics, but you should not be frightened. You probably had poor teachers, etc. We hear it spoken frankly that they often make difficult the things which are simple. So don’t be afraid of mathematics. In connection with language and meanings, we must start with something which is the simplest — mathematics is the very simplest.

> In our seminars we will investigate the factors of evaluation. If evaluation of any subject is correct, could you have then *predictability?* (When I ask the class a question, I expect you to answer; it goes deeper into you if you do.)Have you a sort of feeling or orientation of what it would mean to you in your private life if you could predict that if you did so and so, such and such would happen? Don't you begin to see that your future happiness depends on whether we can have predictability? In mathematics we have a great deal of predictability, also in astronomy, etc.
>
> When you calculate a bridge, you are actually talking to yourself about the bridge; you automatically get predictability about your bridge. Then our bridges do not collapse. Usually we consider mathematics as something special, not realizing that mathematics is a specialized language which as yet is the best in existence, and brings results.
>
> Now, can we do something of that sort in ordinary life? This is a very serious thing because, if we can, then we will have great benefit. If so, we can handle our lives as well as our bridges and sky scrapers. Why is it that our bridges do not collapse, but our private lives do? If we are not foolish about our bridges, why are we foolish about ourselves? The question is — *do we know how to handle our brains?*

A few days later, he began a lecture by reinforcing a message he continually emphasized:

> To repeat — one of the main difficulties in applying general semantics is that although the theoretical issues are very complex, the practical issues are childlike simple. People of your level are not willing to accept something which is too simple, because you fancy you are grown up. I am sorry, you are not grown up.

Among the forty *not grown up* students hearing these words in the summer of 1938 was a 27-year-old Radcliffe graduate who had just recently completed her M.A. in Political Science at the

University of Chicago — Mary Stone Dewing. A few weeks after completing the seminar, the socially-conscious daughter of Dr. Arthur Stone Dewing (a Harvard professor who helped develop what became known as the Harvard "case method" of business evaluation) traveled to California. She accepted an invitation offered by Mr. Donald McLean to speak to the Los Angeles Society for General Semantics. After her talk, she met the young gentleman tending the door, who had collected the admission fees for the evening. A few years later she and Lloyd Morain married. (1)

In 1984, Mary Morain edited a collection of articles selected from the first forty years of *ETC: A Review of General Semantics.* Perhaps consciously, or perhaps subconsciously, she recalled Korzybski's seminar lecture in titling her collection, *Bridging Worlds Through General Semantics.*

Perhaps the most semantically-noteworthy seminar class was that which convened in August 1939 during the summer intensive seminar. The "intensive" seminar was scheduled over eight consecutive days, from ten o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock at night, with a dinner break. Students were encouraged to walk to restaurants within a few blocks of the Institute and eat in groups to discuss what they were learning.

So, if you had registered for the seminar in August 1939, you could have found yourself seated next to, or going out to dinner with, your fellow students: Doctors Irving J. Lee from Northwestern, Elwood Murray from the University of Denver, Dr. S. I. (Don) Hayakawa from the Armour Institute in Chicago, and Wendell Johnson from the University of Iowa, with his wife Edna. (2)

You undoubtedly would have met and enjoyed the acquaintance of the young personable dancer named Charlotte Schuchardt, who would join the Institute's staff the following month as Korzybski's literary secretary and further develop his techniques for "semantic relaxation ." (In 1953, Charlotte Schuchardt married the well-known lexicographer Allen Walker Read, and she has continued her selfless service to the Institute and "the work" for now over 62 years. Her notebook from her first seminar in 1936 locates in the archives. Of the 212 seminars for which we have

records, I believe Charlotte has participated in about 180 — give or take a dozen.)

You might have overlooked one of the students, a gangly young man from Clayton, Missouri. I inferred from the seminar records that William S. Burroughs tended to keep quietly to himself.

Had you attended the prior seminar, in June 1939, you would've met Robert A. Heinlein and his wife. Heinlein, a former naval officer who would later write acclaimed science fiction novels such as *Stranger in a Strange Land,* and his wife Leslyn attended two seminars with Korzybski. And while I'm parenthetically name-dropping, I might mention that Steve Allen attended several days of the 1961 seminar in Santa Barbara, California. He considered general semantics such a worthwhile endeavor that he included a chapter on it his book *Dumbth: And 81 Ways to Make Americans Smarter.*

In 1944, Kendig modified the structure of the seminar to include additional sessions that she termed the *Workshop.* From the announcement for the July 6-28, 1944, *seminar-workshop:*

> The Seminar will consist of thirty-six hours of class lectures by Alfred Korzybski, director of the Institute and author of *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics.* These lectures will be scheduled in the afternoons and evenings during the first ten days, and in general will follow the pattern of the intensive seminars previously given at the Institute.
>
> The Workshop will be directed by M. Kendig, educational director of the Institute, assisted by visiting lecturers and consultants in various fields, who will be invited to conduct lecture-discussion periods and assist individuals and small groups in working out special problems and materials. Some fifty hours of directed work will be scheduled in the mornings, afternoons and evenings.

Kendig's Workshop segment of the seminar-workshop drew an impressive list of guest lecturers throughout the 1940s and 1950s, including names such as Buckminster Fuller, Abraham Maslow, J. Samuel Bois, Allen Walker Read, Norman T. Newton, Buryl Payne, and others.

Next time I'll relate something about a few of the leading "first generation" of general semantics students. (Korzybski and Kendig, in particular, eschewed the use of labels such as *general semanticists* or *GS'ers*. They preferred *students* and its implication of "more to learn.") I'll also include some revealing comments from attendees at the 1950 summer seminar-workshop — the first seminar after Korzybski's death. [The article referenced is available online: www.thisisnotthat.com/articles/etc/60-2-stockdale.pdf .]

Go online to view recorded interviews with these individuals recollecting about Alfred Korzybski and their GS experiences:

D. David Bourland, Jr. and Charlotte Schuchardt Read
http://thisisnotthat.com/video/mp-ddb-csr.html

Bernard Chalip, S.I. Hayakawa, Ernie Klemme, Lloyd Morain, and Dr. Bill Pemberton
http://thisisnotthat.com/video/mp-stade.html

To see and hear clips of Alfred Korzybski:
http://thisisnotthat.com/video/mp-ak.html

Heinlein and Ellis: Converging Competencies

On July 7, 2007, the Heinlein Centennial was held in Kansas City to celebrate what would have been the 100th birthday of acclaimed "Grand Master" science fiction author Robert A. Heinlein. Heinlein is generally acknowledged as one of the four great American science fiction writers, along with Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, and Arthur C. Clarke. Among his most notable books are *Starship Troopers, Stranger in a Strange Land, The Moon is a Harsh Mistress,* and *Time Enough for Love.*

On July 24, 2007, Dr. Albert Ellis died at age 93 in New York City. His front-page obituary in the *New York Times* referred to him as "one of the most influential and provocative figures in modern psychology." He originated the field of psychotherapy known as Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) and authored more than 70 books, including *Overcoming Procrastination, How to Live With a Neurotic, A Guide to Rational Living,* and *How to Stubbornly Refuse to Make Yourself Miserable About Anything — Yes, Anything.*

These two accomplished and celebrated men would seem to have little in common — one a Midwesterner, Naval Academy graduate, futurist, with an almost cult-like following of fans; the other a New Yorker who was referred to as "the Lenny Bruce of psychotherapy," known for his blue language and results-oriented approach to talk therapy.

And yet Robert Heinlein and Albert Ellis shared a common perspective, or point of view, that developed from the same source — Alfred Korzybski and general semantics. Heinlein came to general semantics through Stuart Chase's *The Tyranny of Words* (1938) and attended two seminars with Korzybski in 1939 and 1940. In a speech in 1941, Heinlein made the seemingly

outlandish assertion that Korzybski was "at least as great a man as Einstein" based on his "monumental piece of work," *Science and Sanity.*

Ellis, so far as we know, never met Korzybski but credited him (and general semantics) as a major influence in his development of REBT, using descriptors such as *brilliant¸ masterpiece,* and *pioneer*.

I attended the Heinlein Centennial in Kansas City. One of the panel sessions I attended was on "The Competent Man." I learned this was a theme of Heinlein's that recurred throughout his novels. An oft-repeated quote from Heinlein's novel *Time Enough for Love* concerns competency as a general trait:

> A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects.

I had the privilege to hear Dr. Ellis speak on one memorable occasion a few years ago. In recalling that talk and in reviewing several of his writings, it seems to me that "competency" was also a recurring theme in his work, specifically as it related to *cognitive* competency.

As the lives and contributions of these two great men — Robert A. Heinlein and Dr. Albert Ellis, just seven years apart in age — shared the news pages in the same recent month, we choose to devote this special section of *ETC* to them.

> The best years of your life are the ones in which you decide your problems are your own. You do not blame them on your mother, the ecology, or the president. You realize that you control your own destiny. *Albert Ellis*

> I am free, no matter what rules surround me. If I find them tolerable, I tolerate them; if I find them too obnoxious, I break them. I am free because I know that I alone am morally responsible for everything I do. *Robert A. Heinlein*

What We Could Become

I have read only enough of Heinlein's writings to have a minimally-informed appreciation of his work. But I know something about the field of general semantics, which certainly influenced Heinlein's point of view during his early years as a writer and is unmistakably reflected in character and plot development throughout his work.

In the July 2002 *Heinlein Journal,* Kate Gladstone provided some details from the Institute's archives regarding Heinlein's attendance at two seminars with Alfred Korzybski in 1939 and 1940.(1) From my standpoint, the most interesting piece of Heinlein memorabilia found in the archives is an original transcript of Heinlein's Guest of Honor speech to the 3rd World Science Fiction Convention held in Denver in July 1941. The transcript was sent to the Institute by Heinlein's wife at the time, Leslyn. He titled his address, "The Discovery of the Future," published in 1992 in Yoji Kondo's collection of Heinlein's writings, *Requiem.* As he concluded his Denver speech, Heinlein offered this testimony to Alfred Korzybski and general semantics:

> I save for the last on that list of the books that have greatly affected me, that to my mind are the key books, of the stuff I've piled through, a book that should head the list on the Must List. I wish that, I wish that everyone could read the book – it's just a wish, there aren't that many copies of it, everyone can't, nor could everyone read this particular book. All of you could, you've got the imagination for it. It's *Science and Sanity* by Count Alfred Korzybski, one of the greatest Polish mathematicians when he went into the subject of symbology and started finding out what made us tick, and then worked up in strictly experimental and observational form from the preliminary works of E.T. Bell.

A rigor of epistemology based on E.T. Bell (break in transcript here – some words lost) ... symbology of epistemology. Book refers to the subject of semantics. I know from conversation with a lot of you that the words epistemology and semantics are not unfamiliar to you. But because they may be unfamiliar to some, I'm going to stop and make definitions of these words.

Semantics is simply a study of the symbols we use to communicate. *General Semantics* is an extension of that study to investigate how we evaluate in the use of these symbols. *Epistemology* is a study of *how* we know *what* we know. Maybe that doesn't sound exciting. It is exciting, it's very exciting. To be able to delve back into your own mind and investigate what it is you know, what it is you *can* know and what it is that you *cannot possibly* know is, from a standpoint of intellectual adventure, I think possibly the greatest adventure that a person can indulge in. Beats spaceships.

Incidentally, any of you who are going to be in Denver in the next 5 or 6 weeks will have an opportunity, one of the last opportunities, to hear Alfred Korzybski speak in person. (2) He will be here at a meeting similar to this at a meeting of semanticians from all over the world – oh, McLean from Los Angeles, and Johnson from Iowa and Reiser from Mills College and Kendig and probably Hayakawa from up in Canada – the leading semanticians of the world – to hear Alfred Korzybski speak. I think starting Aug. 9, isn't it, Missy? The early part of August. It'll be in the newspapers in any case. And it's much better to hear him speak than it is to read his books. He's limited by the fact that he's got to stick to the typewriter, to the printed word; but when he talks – when he talks it's another matter! He gestures, he's not tied down with his hands to the desk the way I am; he walks, stumps all around the state, and waves his hands; (audience laughs) ... and you really gather what he means. Incidentally – he looks like A. Conan Doyle's description of Prof. Challenger if Prof. Challenger had shaved his beard. Dynamic character. You may not like him personally, but he's at least as great a man as Einstein – at least – because his field is broader. The same kind of work that Einstein did, the same kind of work, using the same methods; but in a much broader field, much more close to human relationships. I hope that some of you will be able to hear him. I said that this will be one of the last chances, because the old man's well over 70 now; as he puts it, "I *vill* coagulate someday, I

> *vill* someday soon, I *vill* coagulate" – which is the term he uses for dying. (3) He speaks in terms of colloidal chemistry. Properly, it's appropriate. He won't last much longer, in the meantime he's done a monumental piece of work. He has worked out in methodology the same sort of important work that HG Wells did in the matter of description; and the two together are giants in our intellectual horizon, our intellectual matrix today, that stick up over the rest like the Empire State Bldg. (4)

Heinlein wasn't the only futurist who expressed admiration for Korzybski's general semantics.

- A.E. Van Vogt's series of *Null-A* novels was rooted in general semantics and provided many serious students their first exposure to the subject.
- Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*): "A man who knows that there have been many cultures, and that each culture claims to be the best and truest of all, will find it hard to take too seriously the boastings and dogmatizings of his own tradition. Similarly, a man who knows how symbols are related to experience, and who practices the kind of linguistic self-control taught by the exponents of General Semantics, is unlikely to take too seriously the absurd or dangerous nonsense that, within every culture, passes for philosophy, practical wisdom and political argument." (5)
- Alvin Toffler (*Future Shock* and *The Third Wave*) "... all of the questions that are raised by *Science and Sanity* are inherent or should be inherent in the work of any thinking writer or communicator." (6)
- Robert Anton Wilson (*Prometheus Rising, The Illuminatus Trilogy,* and *Schrodinger's Cat*) "All the events in the world that are going on I tend to see through a Korzybskian grid. He made a bigger impression on me than just about any writer I ever read." (7)

I must admit that I've never been a big science fiction fan. My naïve impression has been that most futurists or science fiction writers tend to focus on imagining how future technologies, alter-

native life-forms, or distant universes will be invented, evolved, or discovered.

However, among the authors who claim Korzybski as an influence, I find a common interest in describing or developing human capabilities to their potentials. They seem to delve into positive speculations about what we as humans could become, were we to actually manifest the extensional orientation of perceiving, evaluating, and behaving as prescribed in *Science and Sanity*. Of course, the rocket ships and aliens are still featured aspects, but there is, to my limited reading, an attempt to imbue their characters with an abundance, or absence, of defining characteristics that can be related back to Korzybski's "semantic man." I'd like to give you the briefest of introductions to the subject by discussing just four of what might be referred to as fundamental premises of general semantics.

1. The first premise is that our human abilities to perceive and sense what goes on in our continually-changing environments are limited and differentiated. As members of the human species, our abilities to see, hear, taste, touch, and feel are limited. For example, we know that there are limits to the frequencies humans can hear. We know that humans can't see certain wavelengths of light. We can extend our sensing capabilities through the use of tools and instruments, such as microscopes, telescopes, microphones, amplifiers, etc. Although we as humans share these general sensing potentials, we vary in terms of our actual individual capabilities. We each have a different combination of visual, auditory, and other sensory acuities. Therefore, presented with the 'same' event or stimulus, we will each perceive the event or stimulus according to the limits of our senses and nervous system processing. We will each abstract something different, to some degree, than anyone else and we will then individually construct our experience, awareness, and 'meaning' of the stimulus.

2. A second fundamental premise upon which general semantics is based may be best stated by quoting from the linguistic anthropologist Edward Sapir:

> Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. … We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. (8)

In other words, the culture and language in which we are raised will shape or influence how we construct the 'realities' of our experiences, given the peculiarities of that culture and language. This has become known as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. Similarly, Korzybski posited in *Science and Sanity:*

> ... every language having a structure, by the very nature of language, reflects in its own structure that of the world as assumed by those who evolved the language. In other words, we read unconsciously into the world the structure of the language we use. (9)

> We do not realize what tremendous power the structure of an habitual language has. It is not an exaggeration to say that it enslaves us through the mechanism of semantic reaction and that the structure which a language exhibits, and impresses upon us unconsciously, is automatically projected upon the world around us. (10)

3. Another fundamental premise of general semantics is that humans have the ability to respond conditionally to symbolic (verbal and non-verbal) stimuli. In Russia, Dr. Ivan Pavlov trained his dog to exhibit a behavior now known as a conditioned response. By ringing a bell at the same time he fed the dog, Pavlov conditioned the dog to associate, or identify, the sound of the bell with the food. When the dog heard the bell, it expected food and began salivating in anticipation. Therefore the dog's behavioral response (the salivating) resulted directly from the stimulus of the bell; when Pavlov rang the bell, the dog salivated. Humans, however, have the ability to respond more appropriately in less conditioned ways — condition*ally* rather than condition*ed*. We may talk in terms such as "he really pushed my buttons," but in most cases we have some degree of control over our responsive behaviors, regardless of which button is pushed. If we don't exercise that control, if we immediately react without pause and without regarding the situation and the consequences, then we can rightly be accused of exhibiting more animalistic, rather than more human, behaviors.

4. The fourth premise I would mention in this condensed introduction is related to perhaps the most familiar metaphor associated with Korzybski — *the map is not the territory.* Our ability to achieve "maximum humanness" and evolve to our individual potentials is at least partially a function of how accurately our language behaviors reflect and are consistent with what we 'know' about our world. In other words, our verbal 'maps' ought to be congruent with and structurally similar to the facts of our non-verbal 'territories.' The world of words we put inside our heads ought to be related to and similar with the world of non-words in which we live.

Abraham Maslow, in his study of what he called *self-actualizing* behaviors, wrote of individuals whose internal 'maps'were in synch with their external 'territories':

> One particularly impressive and instructive aspect of this superior relation with reality...was [their ability to] ...distinguish far more easily than most the fresh, concrete, and ideographic from the generic, abstract, and rubricized. The consequence is that they live more in the real world of nature than in the man-made mass of concepts, abstractions, expectations, beliefs, and stereotypes that most people confuse with the world. They are therefore far more apt to perceive what is there rather than their own wishes, hopes, fears, anxieties, their own theories and beliefs or those of their cultural group. (11)

Please note that these four premises do not constitute *all* of the premises of general semantics. Some might claim that these do not even constitute premises as much as they represent derived extrapolations from other, more fundamental, premises. But in the context of this Heinlein Centennial, I hope they provide a basis for re-examining Heinlein's work — particularly his characters — from a general semantics perspective. I suspect that, in addition to his "discovering the future" of interplanetary travel and intergalactic communities, Heinlein has revealed through his fictional characters what we, the readers, might one day become.

And that, to quote the Grand Master, "beats spaceships."

Lay Off of My PERSUADE Shoes

Presentation to the American Advertising Federation of Amarillo, TX,
April 22, 2009

The "Persuasion Industry" was headed for trouble even before the current economic meltdown. With the advent of the Internet, Craigslist, TiVO, and on-demand digital TV, advertisers have struggled to figure out new forms, formats, and formulas that will add to, rather than deplete, their clients' profits. And Public Relations experts are just beginning to deal with the brave new media world of YouTube, blogs, Twitter, and Facebook. Their heavily-massaged "messaging" is now just one of many sources that shape the public's views of the companies, industries, organizations, and individuals who are paying the PR bills. For one observer, what's bad for the purveyors of persuasion is good for the rest of us. Steve Stockdale provocatively suggests that it's time for persuaders from all walks to reconsider their purpose and methods in his presentation, "Lay Off of My PERSUADE Shoes."

I want to thank Leslie for the invitation to come speak with you for a few minutes today. My objective is to give you something to think about, to provoke some reactions. In keeping with the title, I hope I don't step on anybody's toes, but to mix a metaphor, if the shoe fits ....

I'm going to try something a little different as an overview of what I want I want to talk about today. Here are five song titles that I hope give you some idea of what's to come: Bob Dylan's

The times they are a-changin'; Aretha Franklin's *Think!*; Joe Cocker's *Unchain my heart*; Jonny Lang's *Lie to me*; and then closing with the title song, if you will, by Elvis, *Lay off of my PERSUADE shoes*.

There's no doubt that the times are indeed changing, given the number and severity of the many problems or crises we face, not just in the U.S. but throughout the world. These kinds of challenges will require us to bring our "A game" so to speak, if we are to resolve and not become consumed by them.

However, it's pretty clear that one of the overriding crises we face is that for every one of these problems, and most other problems, there's no clear consensus. There's no clear consensus on the nature of these crises, and therefore no consensus on what to do about them. Just about every political party, religious organization, industry group, government, or special interest advocates an approach to these problems that fits their own specific agenda or point of view.

So to make a dent in this list, somehow we're going to have to appeal to our best capabilities as individual human beings, beyond the competing special interests.

That's the big picture that I hope you'll keep in mind as we go through this presentation.

But of course, closer to home with you guys, is the real crisis of what's happening to journalism today, and perhaps to a lesser degree, advertising and PR.

Now, I should say here that these are my own personal assessments. I'm describing what I perceive as a non-credentialed

consumer, I don't have access to any inside information or professional insights.

As I see it, it's not journalism as a process that's broken, but it's the business of journalism, and specifically daily newspapers, that seems now to be on its deathbed. The times that are a-changin' are a-killin' newspapers.

And while the changes aren't yet so visible within advertising and public relations, I would argue that hairline cracks are beginning to show.

For one thing, it's become a commonly-accepted practice, when you have a problem and don't quite understand it or know what to do about it, to change what you call it. And since within the industry, and the university establishment that trains its practitioners, there are moves to new labels such as "Strategic Communications," I'd say that's probably a portent of things to come.

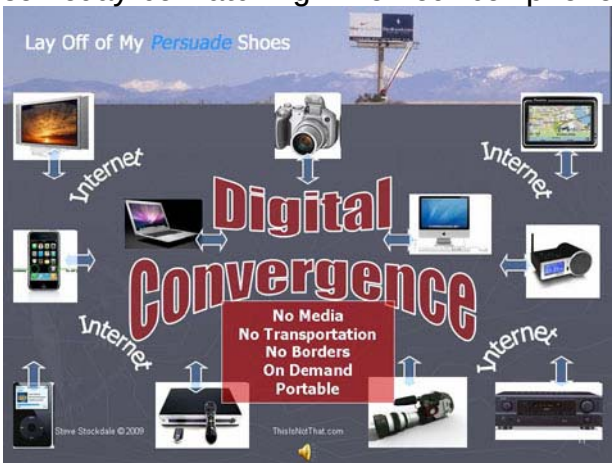
But a more tangible reason for concern for ad/PR interests is that newspapers have historically provided the persuasion industry with a principal platform for their appeals. With the demise of the newspaper as a platform vehicle for advertisements and press releases on behalf of clients, what media will pick up the slack?

From my perspective, change is here and change will continue for journalism, advertising, and PR.

What's driving this change?

I first heard the term "digital convergence" in 1995 when I was working for Texas Instruments. We had a consultant come in to talk with us and one of his themes was "digital convergence." He said that with the advent of the Internet, the new digital mobile phones, and continued miniaturization of consumer

electronics, we were heading toward a future in which all of our major electronics would be able to "talk" or communicate with each other. And one of the effects of that would be that we would someday be watching TV on our cell phones. digital convergence



Well, kudos to that consultant, because digital convergence has happened. Not only do we have new devices that weren't envisioned in 1995, they're all based on digital interfaces that allow us, primarily through the conduit of the Internet, to transfer data from one device to another.

Some of the major consequences of digital convergence include:

- There is no hard media ... it's all bits and bytes and electronic energy.
- Since there's nothing tangible to distribute, there's no need to packaging or shipping so there's no transportation costs.
- The Internet is world-wide, so there are no borders or limits to the range or reach of these digital packages.
- Because the bits and bytes can be stored in computers, and devices with increasing memory capacity, we can read, watch, or listen to the digital content whenever it's convenient.
- And with the latest digital phones, notebook computers, and iPods, we can take our digital media with us wherever we go.

All of this wondrous progress brought to us by digital convergence has all but killed the printed daily newspaper. Why?

Newspapers live by advertising revenue, particularly classified ads. With the widespread availability and effectiveness of free

listing services such as craigslist and eBay, which allow virtually unlimited text space and images to promote whatever it is you have to sell, local classified ads have become marginalized if not altogether unaffordable, ineffective, and unnecessary.

More people are getting their print news online, where the local news must compete with regional, national, and international news ... on demand. That means fewer people are buying newspapers, so for newspapers the circulation revenue stream is also drying up.

So far, newspapers haven't figured out a revenue model for online advertising to replace their print losses.

The biggest factor, however, indicates to me that newspapers are already the 21st century equivalent of the telegram. And that's this: other than personnel, the major cost drivers for newspapers are "bad" and, given the Internet, they're not necessary. When I took the daily *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, I recycled a full grocery sack of wasted newsprint and advertising inserts every week. That amount of waste is bad environmentally. But that's nothing compared to the amount of energy it takes to process and deliver newsprint to the printer, run the printing presses, and then drive the finished product to its destination, whether it's a newsstand downtown or a front porch in the suburbs.

And I said earlier, as the circulation of newspapers shrinks, so shrinks the platform for advertising and PR.

But then looking specifically at advertising and PR in the broader context beyond just the impact of dying newspapers, consider these impacts from digital convergence:

The consumers that used to be reliably reached through "mass media" now have an increasingly large array of choices

beyond the traditional TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines. Not only do consumers spend more and more time online rather than glued to the tube, but they now have hundreds of digital TV channels to choose from, plus TiVo or DVR recording capability. And in addition to the old AM and FM radio stations, we can listen to radio stations from around the world brought to us via the Internet, plus we have satellite radio, and HD radio.

Which means we're a much more fragmented and hard-to-reach audience for advertisers and PR practitioners. They used to think in terms of reaching a "mass market" with a major campaign or initiative. Persuaders now have to prepare a variety of specifically-targeted packages to be delivered across a variety of platforms to reach specifically-targeted demographics.

Perhaps the biggest challenge to those in Public Relations is the fact that with YouTube video, blogs, social networks, and the means to immediately communicate and organize through texting - they no longer exercise a media monopoly on their clients' projected image. The Internet and the integrated digital capabilities it enables can provide just about anyone the means to rant about a company or a politician, or investigate, organize, or mobilize.

If it's still unclear why newspapers are gasping for survival, it might be worthwhile to look at another familiar medium that has been radically transformed as a result of digital convergence.

The 78 rpm record format became a standard in the 1920s, and remained so until the late 40s when the slightly larger 33 1/3 rpm "Long Play" or LP record came on the scene. The smaller 45 rpm format shortly followed.

Then in the late 60s came 8-track tapes, which were short-lived as the cassette tape became the tape format of preference

throughout the 70s. Then in the 80s records and tapes both became obsolete with the emergence of Compact Discs. It looked like CDs would rule for decades ... until digital convergence brought us the media-less advent of iTunes and digital music.

Just as the media of records and CDs evolved into — literally — nothing but bits and bytes, so the medium of the printed daily news is rapidly evolving into ... nothing but bits and bytes. dinosaurs

So from global crises to national problems to worries about millions of jobs, we have lots to think about. What are our prospects for survival?

Well, let's hope they're not this dire. This is a Gary Larson cartoon from 1985. I used it in management presentation when I was rather disenchanted with my employer. To a gathering of other dinosaurs, the leader explains: “The situation’s pretty bleak gentlemen ... the world’s climates are changing, the mammals are taking over, and we all have a brain about the size of a walnut."

After all, we’re humans ... we have our finely-tuned and intricate cortex, or mammalian brain, with which we can intelligently reason. We don't have to rely on our reptilian brain that governs our emotions. We can do better than this roomful of reptilian chauvinists ... right?

We can learn and thoughtfully discern our way through our crises ... Right?

So let's look at a couple of quotes that reflect two different perspectives.

Perspective #1 comes from a book published in 1928:

> *"The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country."*

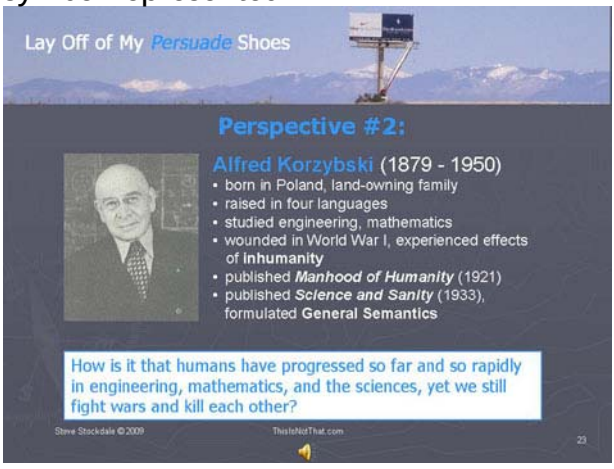
How does that compare with Perspective #2, written in 1933?

"Man's achievements rest upon the use of symbols. For this reason, we must consider ourselves as a symbolic, semantic class of life, and those who rule the symbols, rule us."
Which of these two perspectives do you most agree with?

Which do you believe would be more relevant in terms of thinking our way through our myriad crises?

General Semantics Perspective

Let's look at the author of Perspective #2, Alfred Korzybski. Korzybski was born in 1879 to a land-owning family in Poland. He was raised by servants from four different countries who spoke four different languages. So he grew up with a working knowledge of Polish, Russian, German, and French. In this type of multi-lingual environment, it came naturally to Korzybski to disassociate the word, or symbol, from the thing that the word or symbol represented.



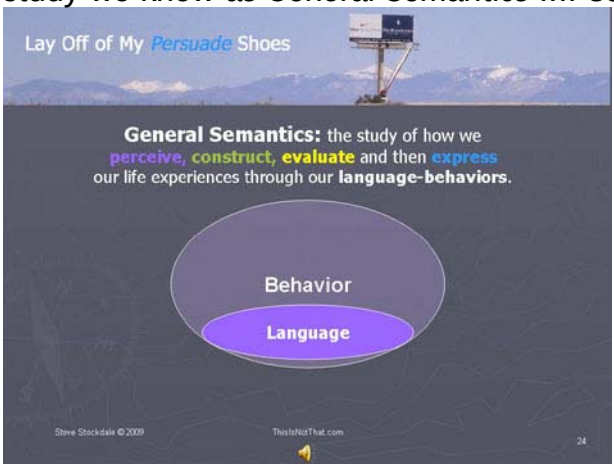
As a student he studied engineering, mathematics, and chemistry. When the first World War erupted in 1914, he was enlisted into the Russian cavalry. Not only was he severely wounded, but he witnessed first hand the devastating effects of all the new weapons of war that debuted during this "war to end all wars" ... airplanes, armored tanks, rapid-fire machine guns, poison gas.

He was sent to North America toward the end of the war when he could no longer serve on the battlefield. He supported artillery testing in Canada before transferring to the U.S. where he traveled the country speaking to groups and selling war bonds.

After the war, he remained in the U.S. and married a woman from Chicago.

He was haunted by his experiences during the war. As an engineer, he pondered this question: How is it that humans have progressed so far and so rapidly in engineering, mathematics, and the sciences, yet we still fight wars and kill each other?

He devoted the rest of his life obsessed with this problem. In 1921 he published his first book, Manhood of Humanity. Then in 1933, he wrote what became the source book for the field of study we know as General Semantics .... Science and Sanity.



Now, I realize that the focus of this presentation is not General Semantics. But since I've taught the subject for the past four years to "mass communi-cations practitioners" I'd like to say a few words about it be-cause it does represent a perspective that I think is important.

The definition I've come to use with my university students is this: *General semantics deals with the study of how we perceive, construct, evaluate and then express our life experiences through our language-behaviors.*

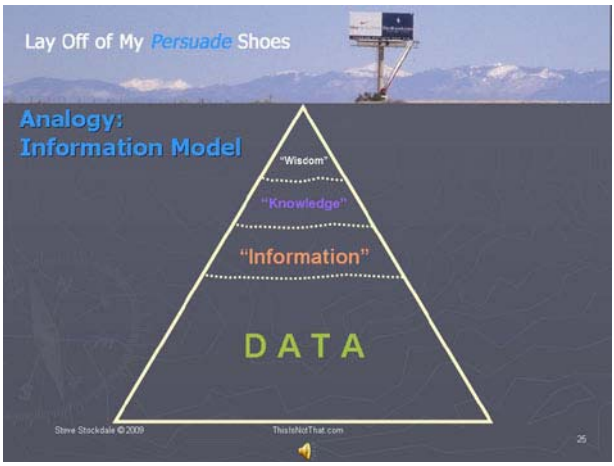
Note that I've connected language and behavior with a hy-phen and refer to language-behavior. I think most people usually talk in terms of language AND behavior as though the two are separated and not associated. But in General Semantics we con-sider language as something that humans, something that you and I as individuals, do ... it's a part of our behavior just as much as our breathing, our eating, our laughing, our crying, our work-ing or playing.

We do language. And because our language-behaviors are so integral to human cooperation, as well as human conflict,

Korzybski spent his life observing, understanding, and documenting this process of perceiving, constructing, evaluating and then responding.

He developed a model or a diagram for visualizing and understanding what he referred to as the abstracting process. But as a way to introduce that, I want to first show you a similar model that you might already be familiar with.

I learned this as the "Information Theory" model. It's simply a pyramid divided into four sections:



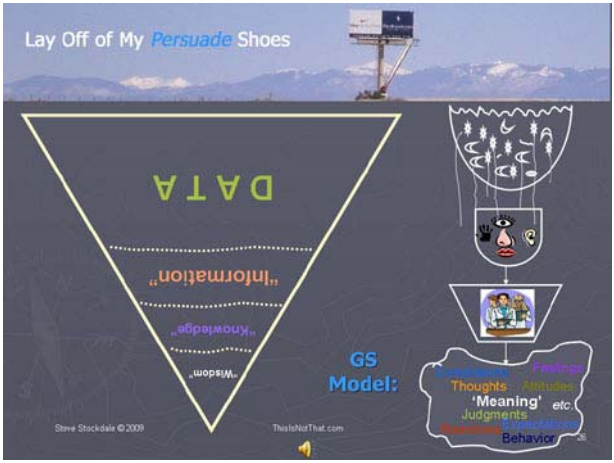
The largest section on the bottom is labeled "data". Above that is a smaller section labeled "information." Then a smaller section labeled "knowledge", and then a top section labeled "wisdom." (Sometimes the "wisdom" section isn't included, and other labels could be substituted for it.)

But the point of the model is to show the relationships that: from much data, we derive (or to use Korzybski's term, we abstract) usable information, from which we can further abstract what we call knowledge ... and then wisdom.

So it's as though we filter out the data that doesn't concern us, we keep and use what does, and from that we construct "information" that we find meaningful. Then we further filter what we've labeled as information that results in what we label knowledge.

Here's a quick example. Take everything that I'm saying as a part of this presentation, as well as every slide and media clip. Every word and every image can be considered a single item of data. As you observe and listen, some of the words and images will amount to nothing more than noise ... but some of it (I hope,

a lot of it) will register with you as something that's relevant or meaningful as information. And when it's over, perhaps you'll say that you learned something and feel more knowledgeable.



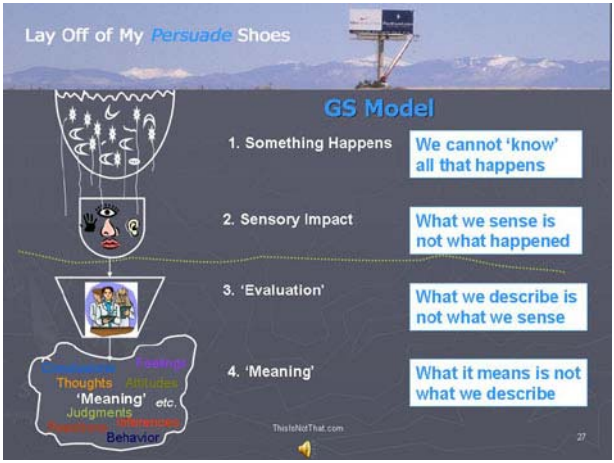
Now let's look at Korzybski's model as similar to this Information model, after we've turned it upside down. Each level compares generally to its corresponding level in the Information model.

Remember that this GS model is diagramming or 'mapping' the process of how we perceive, construct, evaluate, and respond to our life experiences.

The first step in this process of experiencing is that ... well, there's some kind of an experience. Something Happens. It's important for us to realize and be aware that, as humans with finite sensory abilities, we cannot know or experience everything that happens. There are limits to what we can see, hear, smell, touch and taste. So there's a lot more that happens ... there's a lot a more DATA ... than what we can experience.

Secondly, through our senses we interact with our environment. Within the limits of our sensing capabilities, we detect whatever is happening. But it's important to remember that not only can we not sense everything, but what we do sense is to some degree unique to our individual sensory abilities. We each have a different sensory acuity when it comes to our vision, our hearing, our taste discrimination.

And it's also important to remember that what we sense is not "what happened" ... our sense experience is an imperfect abstraction of what happened that's been filtered, you could say, or constructed by the nervous system.



The next part of the process, labeled as "evaluation," represents the first verbal level in which we can describe, or cognitively recognize, what our senses tell us about the experience. But again, what we can say or think or write about the experience, is NOT the experience itself.

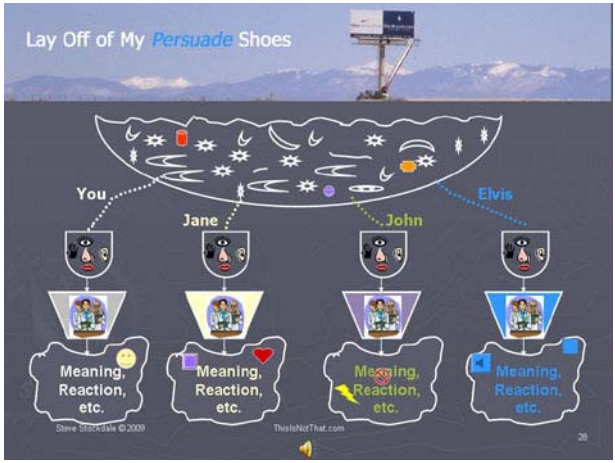
The fourth level then, after the descriptive phase, is labeled as "meaning" ... what the experience means is something more or different than just how we describe it.

So to summarize this process of abstracting:

- What we can sense is NOT what actually happens.
- What we can describe is something other than what we actually sense.
- What an experience means is something more than just what we can describe. What an experience means is the result of this filtering, or abstracting process in which each stage represents a different activity of a physiological process.

As an example, let's consider again what's going on in this room. The "goings on" or "things that are happening" are experienced by each one of you as different individuals. Each of you sees and hears what goes on slightly differently than anyone else.

In the diagram, you see four individuals experiencing the same happening. But we start to see differences in their individual abstracting processes at the evaluation stage, or the third level of describing what they experienced. Let's say they were each asked to write a simple report of "what happened" during today's meeting.



Jane may give a detailed summation of each part of the meeting, as if she were preparing the minutes. John might comment only on the business that was conducted and simply state there followed a program. Elvis might describe what he selected from the lunch buffet in detail, skip over the business matters, and summarize points from my presentation. So each individual's report might be colored or flavored differently.

But then in the final step of the process we can really see the differences between each our hypothetical observers. What they individually got out of this meeting, or what the meeting meant to them, varies a great deal.

In this case, "You" enjoyed it, without any reaction one way or the other. Jane, however, loved it. John didn't really care for it and lost interest, but while his thoughts drifted to a problem he has at work he had a brainstorm he can't wait to go back to implement. Elvis was left wondering about how any of this related to shoes.

So that's a basic introduction to the abstracting process that's central to the GS understanding of how we perceive, construct, evaluate, and respond to our life experiences.

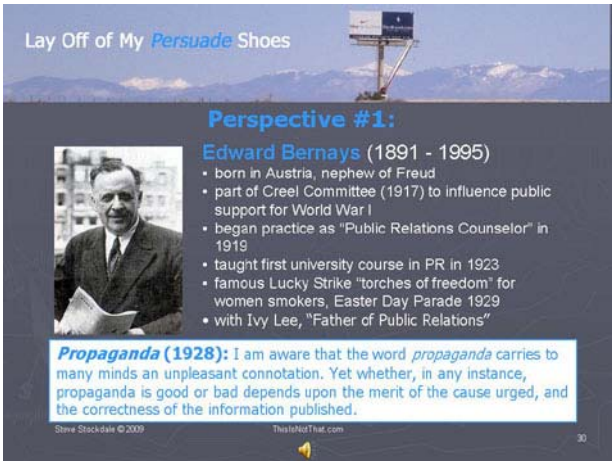
Now let's learn a little about that first perspective.

Edward Bernays and Public Relations Perspective

Since most of you have an Advertising or PR background, I hope you recognize the name of Edward Bernays ... the author of the first perspective we looked at that came from his 1928 book titled, Propaganda.

Born 12 years after Korzybski in Austria, Bernays had a famous uncle - Dr. Sigmund Freud. His family immigrated to the

U.S. and Bernays was one of the early pioneers in the field of public opinion shaping. At the age of 26, he was an important member of President Woodrow Wilson's Creel Committee that was responsible for turning American public opinion in support of the Allies in World War I, paving the way for the U.S. entry in 1917.



Two years later he was credited with opening the first public relations practice. In 1923, he taught the first university course in PR at New York University.

Perhaps his most famous PR initiative was on behalf of Lucky Strike cigarettes in 1929. To increase cigarette sales, the tobacco companies had to overcome the stigma that was attached to "respectable" women smokers. To publicly demonstrate that "respectable" women could smoke, Bernays hired dozens of attractive debutantes to march in the highly-social Easter Day Parade in New York, arm in arm with handsome young escorts, all smoking Lucky Strikes. The staged event was reported in newspapers across the country, and from the perspective of the cigarette manufacturers, it was a great success.

Bernays is generally credited as the father of public relations.

Here's a short clip about Bernays from the 2002 documentary "Toxic Sludge is Good for You."

So we have two different perspectives here ... one that advocates the "unseen mechanism of society ... an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country" ... and the other that is concerned about the means by which individuals can properly evaluate and, if necessary, resist the efforts by the unelected but unseen true rulers of our government ... and therefore, rulers of us.

Given the current crises we discussed before, which of these perspectives do you think is most relevant to you and me? Which do you believe is most well-known, the most taught, and employs the most practitioners?

Not surprisingly, it's the Bernays perspective that's become a major industry, and significant academic field of study.

How has it proven its value? What's the secret to its success over the years?

Following are video clips from two documentaries that address this subject. The first is from the 1984 "The 30-Second President" produced by Bill Moyers. The second is from the 2004 PBS Frontline report titled "The Persuaders." I highly recommend both. You can watch the persuaders online at the pbs.org website.

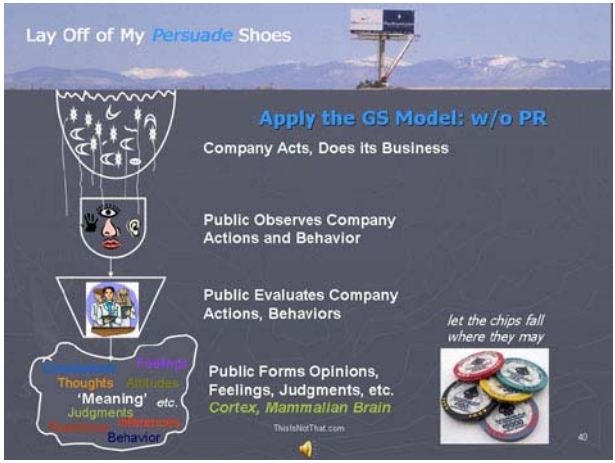
As you watch and listen to these speakers, see if you can discern what the common denominator is, that each considers necessary for a successful advertising or PR campaign.

Here are some of the phrases used in the preceding clips. Do you see a pattern or can you determine what the common denominator is in defining what these advertisers and practitioners are after?

Good on you if made the connection to our poster child for the reptilian brain, which, as I'm sure you know by now, is ... about the size of a walnut.

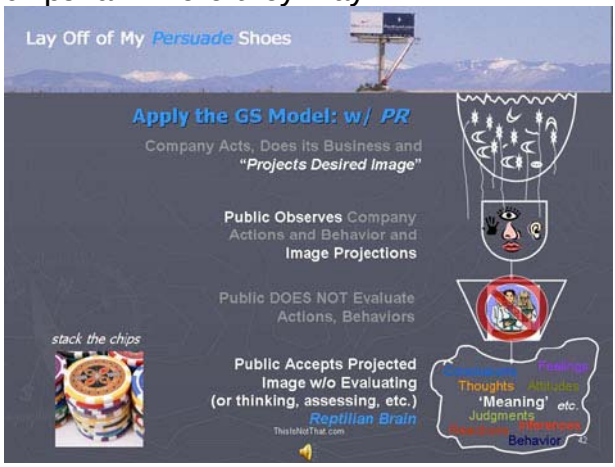
Let's apply the GS model and compare "what's going on" with a hypothetical company using these two perspectives ... Korzybski and GS without PR, vs. Bernays and PR, with PR.

In the first case, our hypothetical company acts, does its business, and generally behaves as it normally does.



The public, to the extent they notice at all, observes the company's actions and behaviors. The public considers and evaluates the company based on these observations; then forms judgments, opinions, feelings, attitudes, etc., about the company.

From the company's perspective, they're off doing their business. With respect to their public image, they're content to let the chips fall where they may.



Now let's look at the same company, but assume that, for some reason, they're concerned about how they are perceived by the public.

They go about their business, but they also begin to do things specifically designed to "project the desired image" they want the public to hold.

The public, which may not be very observant about what the company is doing in the first place, DOES take notice of the PR initiative and observes, not the company's behavior, but its heavily-promoted projections of its desired image.

Therefore in this case, the public does NOT thoughtfully evaluate the company based on what the company does, or how it does its business. Instead, the public uncritically observes and accepts the image that the company projects ... just like the

experts we just heard would advocate. The company (and its PR consultants) know how to push the public's "reptilian hot buttons" ... in other words, rather than let the chips fall, they know how to neatly stack them, as high as they need to be.

Which brings us back to the beginning and our concern about our world crises. Which approach is going to best serve us in grappling with these problems?

Do we want to thoughtfully consider and evaluate the actual facts that are relevant to each of these issues, using the best our cortical brains have to offer?

Or, are we content to be manipulated by the unseen mechanisms of hundreds or thousands of public relations operatives, advocating solely for the short-sighted interests of their clients? In other words, are we content to turn our democratic voices over to our easily-programmed reptilian brains? Which are, of course only ... about the size of a walnut.

Now let's look at a real example of how the Bernays perspective of corporate PR was actually put into practice and how it obliterated the line between responsible public relations and reprehensible propaganda - according to my standards. Your mileage, of course, ... may vary.

Chesapeake Energy Propaganda Campaign

This is a short version of a long story about Chesapeake Energy and what I called their "full-frontal, body-slamming, leg-whipping, arm-twisting, head-butting propaganda blitz" regarding the Barnett Shale.

Some background:

The Barnett Shale is a geological formation that lies under North Central Texas, particularly in the heavily-populated area that includes Fort Worth, DFW Airport, Tarrant, Johnson, Denton, and Wise Counties.

The Barnett Shale contains vast reserves of natural gas at depths of between 6,000 and 8,000 feet.

Until a few years ago, it wasn't profitable to exploit these reserves. But new horizontal drilling and extraction technologies, combined with higher prices for natural gas, have resulted in "drilling fever" throughout north central Texas.

Chesapeake Energy (based in Oklahoma City) is the biggest, and by far the most visible, player in this 21st-century "gas rush."

What happens in Fort Worth is critical to companies like Chesapeake whose business plan is focused on exploring and exploiting these deep shale reserves.

The Barnett Shale is only the first of several major shale plays across the country. And importantly, Fort Worth is the first major city to deal with the effects and consequences of dozens, if not hundreds, of gas wells to be drilled and to operate not just inside the city limits, but throughout all parts of the community and its neighborhoods.

What happens in Fort Worth may well set a precedent for how shale reserves are developed across the country.

The Chesapeake propaganda blitz began early in the spring of 2008, featuring Texas native Tommy Lee Jones on billboards, radio, and television ads all over the Fort Worth-Dallas area.

A couple of months later, Chesapeake began buying air time to show a half-hour infomercial titled "Citizens of the Shale."

Then last July they announced the creation of a new Internet television venture called "shale.tv" to be headed by the "Walter Cronkite" of Dallas-Fort Worth TV news, Tracy Rowlett. In addition to Rowlett, the new venture recruited major producer and editor talent in John Sparks and Olive Talley, plus a handful of other respected journalists.

Then they again bought airtime on a DFW television station to broadcast "Unconventional: The Story of the Barnett Shale", a 50-minute paid-for-documentary produced by Trinity Films.

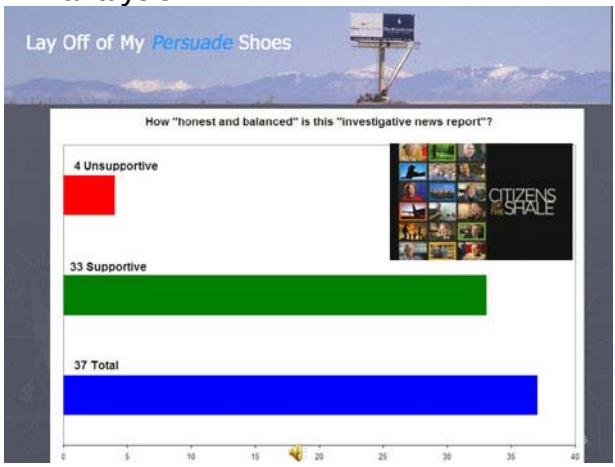
And then, as if all that wasn't enough, came word of a (quote) "16-page children's coloring and activity book featuring Chesapeake Charlie — a friendly beagle who knows a lot about natural gas production and its many benefits." (unquote)

That did it. From my perspective, when you bring in adorable dogs in a coloring book for kids, you've crossed the line. I decided to look more closely into this "marketing initiative/propaganda campaign".

Here's Aubrey McLendon, co-founder, chairman and CEO of Chesapeake Energy, introducing the "Citizens of the Shale". Pay attention to how he represents and characterizes what anyone other than a Chesapeake employee would clearly label as an infomercial. (I've added the subtitled text for emphasis.)

After McLendon's introduction, the program is hosted or narrated by Ginny Simone, identified only with the label of "Reporting." However, far from a "reporter" in the journalistic sense, she's actually a Senior Vice president with the Mercury Group, a subsidiary of Ackerman McQueen, a major public relations firms headquartered in ... Oklahoma City. If you Google Ginny Simone, you'll immediately discover that her primary gig is as a (quote)'reporter' (unquote) for "NRA News," the in-house promotional and advocacy organ for the national rifle association.

analysis



So let's see how true to his word CEO McLendon is regarding his introductory claims about the citizens of the shale "investigative news report."

"Honest and balanced"?

By my count, 37 different people

speak during the "investigative news report." 33 speak in support of urban drilling, most without qualification or concern ... 4 express significant concerns or are unsupportive.

Here are four speakers who appear in the program. Do you think they are supportive or unsupportive?

Here are four other speakers ... supportive or unsupportive?

Supportive or unsupportive?

Supportive or unsupportive?

Here's a different analysis. The program includes about 26 minutes of speaking time during the program. Of those 26 minutes only about a minute, or 3 and a half percent, of the speaking time is given to those 4 unsupportive citizens.

So after analyzing the "Citizens of the Shale" and researching more about Chesapeake Energy and Aubrey Mclendon ...here's what happened ...

Last year I was one of the designated "community columnists" for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. I decided to devote my August 9th column to this propaganda effort.

Within hours after the column came out, I was surprised to be contacted by Olive Talley. She acknowledged and appreciated the concerns I raised in the column and, on behalf of Tracy Rowlett, John Sparks, and the others, offered her willingness to work with me to address those concerns.

I met with Olive a few days later. Which led to me inviting Olive, Tracy, and John to attend my class at TCU, General Semantics for Mass Communications Practitioners, at TCU. Olive and John tentatively accepted.

But over the next month, the world economy and the fortunes of Chesapeake Energy changed dramatically.

Here's a chart of the high and low daily stock prices for Chesapeake for the 12 months since October 2007.

The stock price peaked at $74/share on July 2nd. The shale.tv venture was announced on July 11th. With the collapse of the stock market and world natural gas prices in late September and early October, Chesapeake Energy stock sank to a low of $11.99 on Friday, October 10th. The next Monday, October 13th, Chesapeake announced a series of cost reduction actions, including the termination of the shale.tv project.

However, even after losing their jobs, Olive and John still made it to my general semantics class at TCU on November 11th. (Coincidentally, the 90th anniversary of the armistice that ended the war to end all wars.)

There are indeed many issues related to the Barnett Shale natural gas development. There are legitimate disagreements between those who advocate with different interests. The long-term, and even short-term, impacts on individual property owners and the community as a whole might be significant.

So, from my perspective, what the community needs is an open, transparent, good-faith debate with all parties having equal access to relevant facts, figures, and information. Is that possible when the corporation with the biggest financial stake tries to dominate and manipulate the terms of what little debate they're willing to allow?

Right off the bat, John and Olive revealed a healthy dose of defensiveness. With his opening comments, John took issue with the fact that I introduced him as a "former journalist."

Olive related her disappointment with former colleagues at the *Dallas Morning News* who disparaged her, John, Tracy, and the others as "shills for the Shale."

But despite their defensiveness, they led a wide-ranging discussion with the class for a full hour. They talked about the major stories they had reported or produced throughout their careers. They explained that, had the shale.tv venture continued, they would've brought the same journalistic skills and processes to bear ... regardless of who signed their checks.

They regretted that their former co-workers, and the general public, didn't give them the benefit of the doubt that they could still act and behave as responsible journalists, even in the employ of a corporate interest. They regretted that their corporate employer pulled the plug on them before they had the opportunity to air even one report.

And yet, at the end, they both admitted that, had their shoes been on others' feet ... they would probably have exhibited the same degree of disdainful skepticism as their colleagues.

I came away impressed with John and Olive. I have no reason to doubt or question their sincerity, and had they been able to continue with shale.tv, I believe they would have held true to their journalistic convictions, which I'm guessing, would've eventually caused them some problems with their paycheck signers.

John and Olive's candid comments to the class revealed what might be considered a "dirty little secret" within the professions. Despite the fact that virtually all major universities include both journalism and ad/PR within the same department or college,

there exists a huge chasm between the professions ... at least from the perspective of some journalists.

Beyond the obvious similarity that both professions involve writing and "communicating", the purpose of a journalist differs from the outset to that of the advertiser or PR practitioner.

A PR initiative benefits from employing the appearance of a "journalistic influence". And in fact, as the Chesapeake infomercial clumsily illustrates, shows, PR often tries to represent itself as "news." The more a PR initiative is perceived as "news" or "journalism", the better.

After all, other than format and fees, what's the difference between a "press release" and an advertisement?

The opposite holds for journalists ... real news and real reporting is tainted and discredited once the scent of PR is detected, suspected, or reflected.

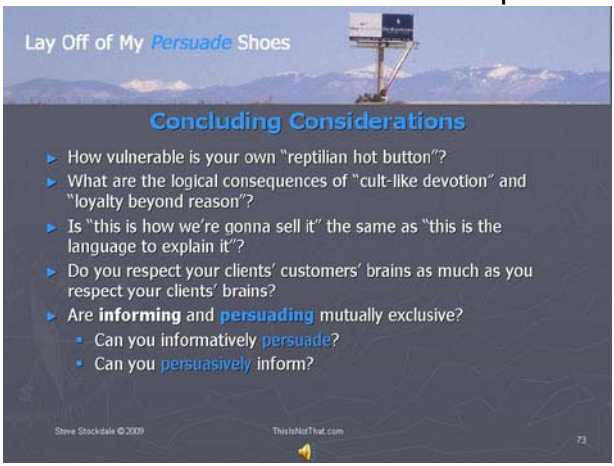
But, unfortunately, the current business conditions have resulted in a one-way flow ... there's no money or (apparent) career potential in journalism, but for the time being there's still money and still hiring in PR. Journalists have few career avenues ... other than to shuffle across to the other side of the street, so to speak.

So where does all of this leave us?

Conclusion: Before I conclude, I want to thank you for your courteous attention. I expected to feel a little like Daniel in the lion's den, coming in here and, more or less, ____ing all over your profession and chosen life's work. Or at least that's the way it might have come across.

I hope not. I hope I've presented some legitimate "information" that provokes the best of your cortical brain and stimulates you to think ... and not just emotionally react.

I want to conclude with some questions you might consider.



Even though you may work 8 to 10 hours a day and get paid for your ability to persuade others, that leaves the majority of your time on the other side of the persuasion ledger. When you're susceptible to the same persuasive ploys implemented by others who are trying to manipulate or influence you. How vulnerable is your "reptilian hot button"?

Are you bothered to hear highly-respected marketers and advertising CEOs speak unabashedly, and unashamedly, in terms such as "cult-like devotion" and "loyalty beyond reason"? What images does that bring to mind? What are the logical consequences of such mindless loyalty? Do we really want to go there?

Some of you may be familiar with Frank Luntz's work, either through his television appearances or his books. You might consider him a genius and wish you had his skills and abilities. Or, you might consider him the true underbelly of the dark side of persuasion.

In either case, consider two different statements made in the clip we watched. Referring to the same language tested with the focus group, he first said: "this is how we're gonna sell it." Then he said, "this is the language to explain it." Are those two statements compatible. Do they express the same, or different, sentiments? And if different, is it a difference that makes a difference?

When you're pitching to a prospective client, you put your and your firm's best, most intelligent, most creative, most persuasive feet forward. You respect the client, knowing that if you're successful, you'll be rewarded, perhaps for years to come. So here's a question … do you respect your client's customers as much as

you respect your client? More specifically, do you respect your client's customers' brains as much as your client's brains?

And finally, a rhetorical question. I hope you've realized that throughout my own presentation, I've attempted to both inform and persuade. So if I've implied that informing is good and persuading is bad, let me correct that now. It's not necessarily an either/or situation ... depending on the motivations of the practitioner.

So what is it that I'm trying persuade you to do? Simply this ... respect your profession. Respect your clients. Respect your clients customers ... especially their brains. Appeal to reason. Raise the bar. Advocate responsibly, in a context larger than your clients immediate concerns. Help us all learn and better discern, so we can all be better "deciders."

I'll leave you with this. You may have wondered about the picture that was at the top of all my slides. I took this photo last month when I was driving from Albuquerque to Santa Fe. I drove through a little valley, then up and over a hill, and this panoramic scene appeared in front of me. I was so moved by it I pulled over - carefully - to photograph it.

What's the point? What does this mean? What's the significance?

To me, it's this ... there are two ways of looking at this photo and what it means. One perspective is to look at this and shake your head in wonder ... "why is there a billboard in the middle of this awe-inspiring scene?"

The other perspective is to look at this and shake your head in wonder ... "why is there *only one* billboard in the middle of this awe-inspiring scene?"

What's your perspective?

View online: http://www.thisisnotthat.com/video/mp-aaf.html

Bib-Vid-liography: Some Resources

The books and videos listed below have shaped or stimulated my thinking about the material in this book. In most cases, I've incorporated excerpts from these items on my website, http://www.ThisIsNotThat.com.

Live links to each of these titles are located at: http://www.ThisIsNotThat.com/bib-vid.html.

Books

- Asim, Jabari — *The N Word: Who Can Say It, Who Shouldn't, and Why*
- Bernays, Edward L. — *Propaganda*
- Bird, Kai and Sherwin, Martin J. — *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer*
- Bois, J. Samuel — *The Art of Awareness*
- Crick, Francis — *Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul*
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly — Flow: *The Psychology of Optimal Experience*
- Edelman, Gerald M. — *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On The Matter Of The Mind*
- *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, quarterly journal for the Institute of General Semantics
- *Gamtano Kariye Gulal*, journal published by B.K. Parekh, Mumbai, India
- Gelb, Michael J. — *How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci: Seven Steps to Genius Every Day*

- *General Semantics Bulletin*, annual yearbook of the Institute of General Semantics
- Gleick, James — *Genius: The Life and Science of Richard Feynman*
- Hawkins, Jeff with Sandra Blakeslee — *On Intelligence*
- Hayakawa, S.I. — *Language in Thought and Action*
- Hayakawa, S.I. — *Symbol, Status, and Personality*
- Johnson, Wendell — *People in Quandaries*
- Koch, Christof — *The Quest for Consciousness: A Neurobiological Approach*
- Kodish, Susan Presby and Bruce I. — *Drive Yourself Sane: Using the Uncommon Sense of General Semantics*
- Korzybski, Alfred — *Manhood of Humanity*
- Korzybski, Alfred — *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*
- Langer, Ellen J. — *Mindfulness*
- Langer, Ellen J. — *The Power Of Mindful Learning*
- Lee, Irving J. — *Language Habits In Human Affairs: An Introduction to General Semantics*
- Maslow, Abraham — *Motivation and Personality*
- Maslow, Abraham — *Toward a Psychology of Being*
- Medina, John J. — *Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School*
- Postman, Neil and Charles Weingartner — *Teaching As a Subversive Activity*
- Ramachandran, V.S. — *A Brief Tour of Human Consciousness: From Impostor Poodles to Purple Numbers*
- Ramachandran, V.S. with Sandra Blakeslee — *Phantoms in the Brain: Probing the Mysteries of the Human Mind*
- Russell, Bertrand — *ABC of Relativity*
- Stanislavski, Constantine — *Building A Character*
- Stauber, John — *Toxic Sludge is Good For You: Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry*
- Tucher, Andie — *Froth and Scum: Truth, Beauty, Goodness, and the Ax Murder in America's First Mass Medium*
- Weinberg, Harry L. — *Levels of Knowing and Existence*

- Whorf, Benjamin Lee — *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*

Video, Documentaries

- 100 Greatest Discoveries 5 DVD Complete Set
- An Inconvenient Truth
- The Beatles Anthology
- Blue Man Group: Inside the Tube
- Eyes on the Prize Official PBS DVD Release
- Faces of the Enemy (not an Amazon link)
- F**K - A Documentary
- Frontline: The Persuaders; or watch online at PBS.org
- In the Shadow of the Moon
- Maya Lin - A Strong Clear Vision
- Mindwalk [VHS]
- NOVA: The Best Mind Since Einstein
- NOVA: Secrets of the Mind
- Shut Up & Sing, the Dixie Chicks
- Talking Sense, Irving J. Lee, from the televised series "Of Men and Ideas" (1952), available from the Institute of General Semantics
- The Brain: Our Universe Within - Evolution & Perception
- The Films of Charles & Ray Eames - The Powers of 10 (Vol. 1)
- The N Word - Divided We Stand
- The War - A Film By Ken Burns and Lynn Novick
- Toxic Sludge is Good for You: The Public Relations Industry Unspun from the Media Education Foundation website
- The U.S. vs. John Lennon

Video, Entertainment

- Austin Powers - International Man of Mystery (New Line Platinum Series)
- Blazing Saddles (30th Anniversary Special Edition)
- Chris Rock: Kill the Messenger
- Cool Hand Luke (Deluxe Edition)

- Dress to Kill
- Flight of the Conchords - The Complete First Season
- George Carlin - Doin' It Again
- Herbie Hancock : Possibilities (DVD / CD)
- How to Be a Megastar Live! (DVD with CD)
- Lucky Louie - The Complete First Season
- Monty Python's Life Of Brian - The Immaculate Edition
- South Pacific (Collector's Edition)
- V for Vendetta (Two-Disc Special Edition)

Links to GS Resources at ThisIsNotThat.com

Over 150 pertinent quotes, all relevant to and consistent with a world view based on differences that make a differences: http://www.thisisnotthat.com/quotes.html

Learning Resources: http://ThisIsNotThat.com/learn.html

Teaching Resources: http://ThisIsNotThat.com/teach.html

Demonstrations and Exercises: http://ThisIsNotThat.com/learn/dem/index.html

More than 150 video clips: http://ThisIsNotThat.com/video/index.html

Bib-Vid-liography containing references to more than 30 books and videos: http://ThisIsNotThat.com/bib-vid.html

Published newspaper, magazine, and online articles about Steve Stockdale and his work with general semantics: http://ThisIsNotThat.com/articles/pubs/index.html

An Essay on Levels of Abstractions

I have always been interested in language. Language, to me, is one of the essential needs of man, because it allows him to communicate with his fellow man. This communication may take many forms. It may be informative, directive, persuasive, questioning, or entertaining. Language serves a purpose by enabling man to communicate. This is the extent of what I have always thought about language. But after reading S. I. Hayakawa's *Language in Thought and Action*, I now realize that my views about the use of language were narrow and short-sided. My emphasis has always been on the actual content of the communication, the message which is encoded by the transmitter and then decoded by the receiver. I have thought that if you improve the message, you will improve the communication, and I neglected the roles that the transmitter and receiver play in the communicative process. Mr. Hayakawa has corrected my thinking, as well as enlightening me as to much a much broader view of the uses, and misuses, of language.

One facet of language which I had not before considered is that it is language which enables man to either cooperate, through agreement, or argue through disagreement. Our existence as a society is based on an innumerable set of implied or stated agreements, such as, "*I won't hit you if you won't hit me*," and "*You stay out of my house and I'll stay out of yours*." Without these agreements, we would not be free to prosper and progress, and would become merely another species of animals fighting to survive. Hayakawa's theme in writing the book is his contention:

> that widespread intraspecific co-operation through the use of language is the fundamental mechanism of human survival,

> and that, when the use of language results, as it so often does, in the creation or aggravation of disagreements and conflicts, there is something wrong with the speaker, the listener, or both. (p. 307)

There are two reasons why I believe this contention and the conclusions he reaches. The first is that what he says makes sense. We are all aware of stumbling blocks associated with language and the problems of social conflicts. We all must face prejudices, discrimination, excessive generalization, misinterpreted meanings, and simple ignorance. We often recognize these faults in others, but seldom do we hold ourselves up to the same scrutiny. Hayakawa outlines a framework for an orientation which, if carefully administered, will help us to use the language effectively and cooperatively, and will assist us in recognizing that language which discourages cooperation.

The second reason I feel his ideas are valid is that, despite the fact that he originally wrote the book forty years ago, the material is still very much applicable to the rapidly-changing life we now experience. In summarizing his conclusions, Hayakawa offers ten rules for ensuring a proper orientation when evaluating language use. He suggests memorizing them, much like multiplication tables, for daily use. Because of the many specially-defined terms and extensive background he develops in support of his rules, it is impractical for me to list and discuss all ten rules in a short paper. I will attempt to discuss what I consider to be one of the most interesting concepts he presents — the *levels of abstractions*.

The process of *abstracting* is integral to the ability of language to adequately function. Abstracting may be considered as a kind of classification procedure. Al lives in a house, Mike lives in an apartment, and Joe lives in a condominium, yet at five o'clock every afternoon, each says he is going *home*. This is an example of abstracting. It is the selection, rejection, and regrouping of certain characteristics of word meanings to form a new, more encompassing meaning. In order to understand this abstracting process, Hayakawa places the process upon an abstraction ladder.

At the bottom of the abstraction ladder is an object. As an example, we will use a cow named *Bessie*. The cow itself exists before we give it a name or assign a word to classify it. It is composed of muscle, bones, skin, and thousands of constantly changing operations inside. It contains a circulatory system, a respiratory system, a digestive tract. As our first step up the ladder, we may disregard or ignore all the biological processes which comprise the object, but we retain its physical properties — its color, size, shape, etc. — and we call it *Bessie*.

As we sit in the pasture and watch Bessie do whatever it is she does in the pasture, we see another form approaching. It is walking on four legs, like Bessie. It has the same general shape as Bessie, and makes a similar mooing sound. Although it is not the exact same size or color as Bessie, we can see that there are a great many common characteristics. We decide that both Bessie and the newcomer, as well as any creature that possesses these same common characteristics, will be called *cows*. We may continue up the ladder as we observe other animals on the farm. We recognize horses, and a goat, and some chickens. These objects all have some similar attributes as the cows. They are all animals, and they perform some function around the farm, although the horses do not give milk and the cows do not lay eggs. We ignore the difference among the animals, instead concentrating on their similarities, and refer to the entire collection of animals as *livestock*. When we say *livestock*, we are still saying something about Bessie, but we are referring only to those characteristics of Bessie which are common to the other animals on the farm.

If I have adequately explained this transformation from the physical object to *livestock*, it should be clear how we can continue up the ladder. If the owner of the farm decided to group his livestock, barn, and tractors together, he could call them his *farm assets*. By combining his farm assets with his house, cars, and savings, he could determine his *wealth*. The farmer's wealth now includes Bessie, but with each step up the ladder, certain characteristics have been deleted (those which do not contribute to the farmer's wealth). It is the process of abstraction which enables us to start with the physical object (*Bessie*) and conclude with the

abstract concept (*wealth*). It is important to remember that, for any object, there are a multitude of 'ladders' which will abstract in many different directions. For example, we could easily have abstracted *cow* into *food* had we chosen to. A veterinarian could have offered a more detailed grouping by naming Bessie as a specific breed or species of bovine. When we abstract, then, we abstract according to the demands of the context.

The ladder of abstraction plays an important role in our ability to define unfamiliar words. Visualizing the bottom rung of the ladder as *Bessie* and the top as *wealth*, it is much easier to define *Bessie* than it is *wealth*. We can simply point to Bessie to make our meaning known, but in order to explain the meaning of *wealth* we must use other words. This is the difference between extensional meaning (the physical Bessie) and in tensional meaning (the abstract wealth). If we must use words when defining, it is imperative that we use those words found below the word in question on the ladder of abstraction. The definition must point toward the extensional for the meaning to be understandable. For example, in defining the word *livestock*, we would want to say something about cows and horses and chickens rather than discussing assets or wealth. The most effective, meaningful definition is one in which specific examples are given which point directly to the meaning of the word.

A recurring pitfall which should be recognized and avoided is the confusing levels of abstraction. This is a fairly typical ploy of politicians. Say the mayor of Podunk decides that the new highway needs to be built through Farmer Jones's land. When farmer Jones wants to know why the highway is to be built across his land and not the mayor's, the mayor may reply that "*the future of this town depends upon our access to rapid transportation links with the rest of the state*." Besides blowing a lot of hot air, the mayor is intentionally changing levels of abstracting in order to cloud the issue. In this instance, he raised the level. If he had pulled from his pocket the county's cost analysis of alternatives, including right-of-way grants, dislocation fees, purchase prices, taxes, and family dislocation, then he would have lowered the abstraction level. He could have stated, "*This route will affect the*

least number of people and will cost the least money," and remained on approximately the same level. Compared to the other two responses, the last would probably have won him more votes.

This is not to say that high level abstractions do not serve a useful purpose. It should be understood that abstracting, or generalizing, is an invaluable tool. Instead of having to say, "*the T.C.U. quarterback is a good ball player, as is the fullback, and the halfback, and the center, etc.,*" we can abstract that "*the T.C.U. football team is good*." It is infinitely more convenient to be able to state in a single thought what might take paragraphs of lower level abstraction occurred when Jesus stated the Golden Rule. He could have begun, "*If you don't want to be hit, don't hit your neighbor. If you don't want your neighbor to mess around with your wife, don't mess around with his*." If he had, he might still be giving us examples. Instead, millions of lives are directed by the simple command to "*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*"

An understanding of abstractions is necessary when we realize that all that we know is abstractions. When I say that I *know* my car, my knowledge is an abstraction of the totality of the car. I cannot witness or experience (or, for that matter, explain) the molecular interactions which result in the internal combustion which powers pistons, etc. Because I do not know everything about the car, I must abstract those characteristics of the car which provide a meaning for me. By the same token, there is nothing about which we know everything; thus, our requirement to abstract.

The key to effective use of abstracts is not whether the abstractions are high level or low level, but whether the abstraction can be referred to a lower level. In other words, suppose I were to say that T.C.U. represents one of the finest athletic institutions in the United States. For me to convince someone else that this is true, or to insure that this statement contains meaning, I must also know something about *athletics* (football, basketball, baseball, track, etc.) as well as *other institutions* (colleges, universities, prisons, hospitals) and the *United States* (Texas, Oklahoma, New England, the Northwest). What we should strive for, then, is to

learn new lower level abstractions and abstract them to become part of our existing higher levels, or to create new higher levels.

I do not presume that I have mastered all of S.I. Hayakawa's rules, or that I have become the resident expert on abstractions. Any specific knowledge which I might have retained is a fringe benefit. The greatest result from reading this book is that my awareness of the purposes, uses, and limitations of language has been considerably broadened. I am tremendously impressed with the ability of Mr. Hayakawa to express himself while concerning himself with many higher abstractions. Just in preparing this short paper, I have realized how difficult it is to write about words. But I feel that this study is important. As our lives become more and more complicated due to rapidly changing technology, the decay of longstanding institutions, and increasing individual freedoms, our willingness and ability to cooperate must also increase. An understanding of language, as outlined by Mr. Hayakawa, is essential for continued cooperation.

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Snooping Around the Time-Binding Attic (p.221)
Published in *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* Volume 59 Number 1. (2002)

1. Accounts of Lloyd and Mary Morain's experiences with Korzybski, their first meeting, and Dr. Dewing come from an interview with Lloyd videotaped by Greg Sawin on May 27, 2000. Dr. Dewing served as an Honorary Trustee of the Institute. Students of general semantics and readers of *ETC* may recognize the Morain's as long-time supporters not only of general semantics, but also of such so-cially-conscious causes as humanism and population control. Mary died in 1998.
2. Lee, Murray, Hayakawa and Johnson became some of the most recognized first-generation students of Korzybski. They were among the founders of the Chicago-based Society for General Semantics in 1942, which a few years later changed its name to the International Society for General Semantics. Some of their interpretations and presentations of general semantics are available from the ISGS and the IGS, including Lee's *Language Habits in Human Affairs* and Johnson's *People In Quandaries.*

Heinlein and Ellis: Converging Competencies (p.230)
Published in *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* Volume 64 Number 4. (2007)

1. www.heinleinsociety.org/rah/history/GeneralSemanticsInfo.html
2. Heinlein refers to the Second American Congress on General Semantics held at Denver University in August 1941.
3. In 1941, Korzybski was only 61 years old. He died in 1950 at age 70.
4. Heinlein, Robert A. (1941) "The Discovery of the Future." Speech delivered as Guest of Honor to the 3rd World Science Fiction Con-vention, Denver, CO. July 4, 1941. Recorded on discs by Walter J.

Daugherty. Transcripted by Assorted Services. Presented by Forrest J. Ackerman. A Novacious Publication.
5. Huxley, Aldous. "Culture and the Individual." *Playboy Magazine,* November 1963.
6. Toffler, Alvin. (1991) "The Relevance of General Semantics." *Thinking CreAtically*, Institute of General Semantics, Englewood, New Jersey.
7. Wilson, Robert Anton. (2001) "The Map Is Not the Territory: The Future Is Not the Past." Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture, 1997. *The General Semantics Bulletin Numbers 65-68.*
8. Whorf, Benjamin Lee. (1956) *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf* edited by John B. Carroll, p. 134. The M.I.T. Press, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Reprinted from *Language, Culture, and Personality, Essays in Memory of Edward Sapir*, edited by Leslie Spier, Sapir Memorial Publication Fund, Menasha, Wisconsin, 1941.
9. Korzybski, Alfred. (1933) *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*, p.59-60, Fifth Edition (1994). Institute of General Semantics, Englewood, New Jersey.
10. Korzybski, Alfred. (1933) *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics,* p.90, Fifth Edition (1994). Institute of General Semantics, Englewood, New Jersey.
11. Maslow, A.H. (1954) *Motivation and Personality,* p. 205. Harper & Brothers, New York.

Lay Off of My Persuade Shoes (p.239)

A presentation made to the Amarillo (TX) Advertising Federation. (2009)

An Essay on Levels of Abstractions (p.268)

Based on *Language in Thought and Action* by S.I. Hayakawa. Prepared for Dr. Greg Allar, Texas Christian University. (1979) The quotation from the book is found on page 307.

Quote (p.last)

Johnson, Wendell. "After You Have Studied General Semantics," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* Volume 61 Number 4. (2004)

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General semantics contains no recipe for boredom. You are not likely ever to say of it, as you may have said from time to time of a course in history, or mathematics, or French, that you “have had it.” At least, if ever you do say of general semantics that you “have had it,” as though for you it were over and done with, you probably didn’t “get” it.

Wendell Johnson